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# A Step into The Past

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Book 04

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Huang Yi

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## Chapter 1

### Fierce Beauty

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Ji Yanran's abode is made from white stone, hidden amongst the flowers and trees and its style was ancient and exquisite, like a building in heaven and those staying inside were beautiful fairies.

Walking up the stone steps to the building, inside the door there was an exquisite stand for the guests to put their cloaks and weapons. 2 pretty maids were already waiting there to serve them.

Tan Bang went close to Xiang Shaolong's ears and whispered, "Learned lady Ji does not like people to bring swords into her abode."

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head to show his understanding and thought to himself that this Learned lady Ji is really putting on airs. She obviously knows that an esteemed guest like Prince Xinling has arrived but she was still napping and her maids dared not wake her up as well. Furthermore, she refused to let anyone enter with weapons. But he thought about it again and felt that her haughty attitude is well done as well, because truthfully, he has to admit that men are cheap. The more difficult it is to get the woman, the more precious she will be. Even now he is thirsting to find out how truly beautiful she is.

The 2 pretty maids seems especially taken with Xiang Shaolong as they served him meticulously, carefully dusting off the dirt and dust on his clothes

before presenting him.

After all the various work was done, the 4 entered the hall.

They had just walked past the door when a loud and crisp voice shouted next to Xiang Shaolong, “Esteemed guests have arrived! Esteemed guests have arrived!”

Xiang Shaolong was taken unawares and totally startled. He looked towards the voice and can’t help but laugh, because it’s a talking parrot perched on a stand.

The 2 pretty maids obviously doted on it and they smiled daintily as they fed this interesting animal.

Xiang Shaolong glanced around.

The large hall was elegantly decorated but the most unique part is that there are no rugs, just a few square tables and mats. The hall was filled with strange bonsai, as if they have moved part of the garden outside into here.

On one of the huge walls hung a large painting of a beautiful woman, wearing light and thin clothes, looking quietly elegant, just like the talent and elegance exuded by the mistress here.

Of the group of 4 tables in the hall, 3 groups were filled and there were 2 to 6 people in each group. All of them talked softly, as if afraid to awaken the mistress from her nap.

Prince Xinling led them and walked into the hall and immediately more than half the people stood up and pay their respects to this second in command in Wei. Obviously it was the first time the rest of the people had seen him, and only when they realized who he is, they hurriedly stood up and paid their respects as well.

With one look Xiang Shaolong took notice of a few of the people.

Especially the group of 4 near the window on the left side. 3 of them were dressed in warrior's clothes and have an outstanding aura, but what stirred his notice was the ferocity they exuded. Especially one of the large sized men who is built like a mountain and a little taller than Xiang Shaolong. His limbs were extremely thick, his long hair touching his shoulder, wearing a silver decorative piece on his forehead. His face was wide, his back broad, his eyes large like copper bells with a look of viciousness and slyness. He looks majestic and his whole body exuded an evil and shocking charisma.

The 2 warriors beside him were both fierce and vicious looking but next to him, they immediately paled in comparison. The strangest thing is the hands of the 3 of them all bore scars of being burnt by fire.

Another who took his notice was the group of 6 men on the right dressed as scholars. One of them was tall with a refined look, the deep eyes shimmering with intellect, looking like an immortal.

There was only 2 people in the last group, the shorter one with an average look and from his clothes, one can tell that he is not a Wei. One wonders which country he could have come from, but for someone who can come

here and see Ji Yanran, he is naturally a person of a certain status.

Prince Xinling first greeted the group of 6 on the right, and spoke to the refined looking man, "We were just talking about Mister Zou, and did not expect to see you so soon." He waved at Xiang Shaolong and said, "Shaolong, come over and meet this extremely gifted man with foresight Mister Zou Yan."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, so this is the philosopher who is famed because of his 'Sayings of the 5 merits'. He was about to come forward and offer his respects when a loud and thick voice from the left rang out, "Master Wuji, may I ask if this is the Imperial Protector from the state of Zhao, Brother Xiang Shaolong?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled and looked towards the voice. The person who spoke was the warrior who looked like the devil reincarnated.

Obviously Prince Xinling does not recognize this person and asked in surprise, "This gentleman is..."

The Wei who looks like the person who introduced these 3 warriors here to meet Ji Yanran stepped forward and said respectfully, "Feng Zhisen is a guest under Lord Longyang, pays his respect to Sir. This person whose intellect and bravery is known throughout the state of Qi is Mister Xiao Weimou, the warrior on the right is called Ning Chong, the one on the left is Zheng Lei. They are all famous warriors in Qi and Mister Wei's personal fighters."

Prince Xinling and Xiang Shaolong were both equally shocked, they did not

expect this ferocious man would chase him so closely. Since he is now openly going after him in Daliang, he must be up to something nefarious. Obviously he is under the protection of Lord Longyang and has the backing of the King of Wei, no wonder he dares to be so rude here.

Just as Xiang Shaolong feels a huge headache coming on, Xiao Weimou took a huge step forward and after paying his respects to Prince Xinling, turned towards Xiang Shaolong, extended his hand and said, "I've long heard that Brother Xiang's swordsmanship is outstanding, if there's a chance I must exchange pointers with you."

Xiang Shaolong knows that he wants to compete with him on strength and has no choice but to extend his own hand as well.

The corners of Xiao Weimou's mouth curved up into a cold smile as he used his strength to shake his hand. For a moment Xiang Shaolong felt as if his hands has been clasped with an iron manacle that is still being tightened.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled. Although he can still manage to fend him off, he still felt the pain in his hands as if the bones are cracking and he knows that his opponent's arm strength is definitely better than his.

Luckily he has a higher tolerance than ordinary men and did not embarrass himself in public. He even managed a smile and said, "Has Mister Wei just had an accident with fire, why do your hands look as if they have been burnt?"

A mad fury flashed past Xiao Weimou's eyes and he increased the pressure in

his arms and said icily, "It's just some silly act by some low down person. It's nothing much, besides, such childish pranks can only last for a moment. Sooner or later I will crush him to pieces."

Such an explosive atmosphere, even Zou Yan and the rest can clearly feel that something unpleasant had happened between the 2 of them.

Xiang Shaolong bitterly withstood his startling arm strength.

Xiao Weimou had wanted to crush his fingers to pieces immediately so that he will no longer be able to use the sword. But after testing Xiang Shaolong's strength, he knows that he would not be able to achieve his ideal effect, so with a cold laugh, he released his hand and went back.

His 2 subordinates stared at Xiang Shaolong with deep hatred. Obviously that fire had burned them quite badly.

Prince Xinling signaled to Xiang Shaolong with a look and introduced the Weis next to Zou Yan, who are all famous men or senior officials. Obviously Zou Yan is very popular with the Weis.

After the round of introductions, Prince Xinling's gaze rested on the last group of Weis and said with a smile, "This is the first time I've seen Mister Zhang Fengchang here." He looked at the person who is of average built next to him, and besides his intelligent eyes, the rest of him looks average and asked, "This gentleman is..."

Zhang Fengchang laughed, "This is Master Han Fei from the state of Han. I'm



here all thanks to him today, because Miss Ji was complimenting Master Han's book 'Speaking of Difficulties' after reading it and sent word to say she would like to meet him. Therefore I have to accompany and bring Master Han here to meet Miss."

Prince Xinling and the rest were all excited as they did not expect to see such a famed intellectual here. But at the same time they feel a little cheated, as they did not expect this person to look so ordinary.

This famous Han Fei whose name had gone down centuries is not one good at socializing. He just smiled clumsily, bowed slightly and to him it means offering a greeting.

The 2 pretty maids hurriedly invited Prince Xinling and his men to be seated at a low table opposite Han Fei and his friend.

By then only the table beneath the large painting of the beauty was empty, and this must be where Learned lady Ji will be seated.

Like the others, Xiang Shaolong sat around the table, eating the snacks the maids brought out but his heart is in a turmoil.

With the arrival of Xiao Weimou, the situation has become even more complicated.

Besides, this person has amazing arm strength and his body is as solid as steel. Xiang Shaolong may be talented, but he may not be his match as well. If he were to join hands with Lord Longyang, and with Prince Xinling

harboring hidden agendas about him, his trip here will really be filled with danger.

As he was thinking, he heard Prince Xinling asking Han Feizi, “Does Master Han have something to attend to during your trip to our state this time? Please let us know so that I can see if there’s any way I can help?”

Hai Fei replied, “This time... Hai! This time I came under the orders of my King, to come... come here and borrow rations.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly startled, he did not expect Han Fei to have a stutter, and his words are not adequate to express his meaning. He doesn’t even know how to take the opportunity to speak up for his cause and point out why Wei should lend rations to Han.

Indeed Prince Xinling furrowed his brows and replied, “So that’s the case, how much does your country need to borrow?”

Han Fei replied, “10,000 stones!” And he stopped short at that, not elaborating further.

Naturally Prince Xinling was unperturbed but just smiled and did not converse further.

Zou Yan said loudly, “Downfall comes after the peak, and after downfall comes the peak, the exchange of the 5 merits. Actually there were signs long ago that the state of Han will suffer from drought. 5 years ago I saw a meteor fall into the boundaries of Han, and I said there will certainly be calamity, and

now the prediction has come true.”

Han Feizi furrowed his brows, obviously unhappy and he did not believe Zou Yan’s words at all. But the others around Zou Yan all agreed with him.

Xiao Weimou who is from Qi like Zou Yan, laughed “Mister Zou is indeed far sighted. Now the world is ruled by 7 states, would Mister be able to explain where the future will lie and enlighten us?”

Zou Yan smiled slightly and was about to reply when they heard the sounds of adornments clinking and a beauty, with the accompaniment of 4 maids, walked into the hall from the inside.

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly looked over and he felt his brains go numb from shock.

A beauty who looks like a fairy with supple skin and luminance being escorted out by pretty maids, like the moon being supported by many stars, walking daintily forward. This scene captivated everyone, their souls seemed to have gone to heaven.

Her hair was combed into a high bun at the side, which matches her slim body and tiny waist. Her slim neck and fair skin was alluring, their brightness captivating.

Her eyes were deep and dark with reflections like the water. No wonder her beauty is known far and wide, she is absolutely enthralling.

She was wearing a long white robe with flowers, which flitted prettily as she moved, the wide sleeves fluttering, enhancing her beauty and posture.

Her alluring outer beauty as well as her captivating inner beauty came together to form a painting of a beauty. Xiang Shaolong felt as if he's in heaven, and totally forgot about the things happening on earth.

Even with Wu Tingfang's beauty, she pales a little even when compared to her, so apparently she is extremely enchanting.

Ji Yanran walked over prettily and leaned languidly on the tall cushion behind the long table in the middle, looking even more charismatic than ever.

The way she half sat and half leaned back is already alluring, but when she kept her legs up the rug, her skirt moved up to reveal her fair, flawless and supple dainty feet which makes Xiang Shaolong feel like crawling up the rug and pin her underneath so that he can explore her body and inhale her fragrance.

After Ji Yanran seated herself properly, she tilted her pretty head and said with a smile, "Yanran was too fond of sleeping and have made everyone wait so long!"

Xiang Shaolong regained his senses and took a look at the rest. He saw that Prince Xinling, Zou Yan, Han Fei, Xiao Weimou and everyone else looked enchanted; they have even less self-control than him.

Just as everyone hurriedly assured her that it's all right, Ji Yanran's shiny,

lively and dark eyes flitted towards Xiang Shaolong and looked at him before flitting over to Xiao Weimou's table, scrutinizing the rest of the people and lastly looked at Han Fei. A look of joy passed over as she exclaimed happily, "Would this be Master Han Fei?"

Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Weimou were both greatly disappointed, obviously Ji Yanran is more interested in Han Fei than in them.

Han Fei's face blushed red and replied nervously, "I am indeed Han Fei."

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes lighted up as she gushed happily, "After reading Master's grand works, it indeed has views that no one else has thought of before, I am extremely awed."

Xiang Shaolong felt extremely disappointed, this Han Fei's appearance has no attraction at all yet Ji Yanran is looking at him differently. Obviously this woman is more concerned about a person's intellect. When it comes to compositions or debates, if he compares himself to Han Fei, it would be like the comparison between a kindergarten student and a Nobel Prize winner. But he feels a little relieved as well, because he has problems preserving his own life now, so no matter how alluring Ji Yanran is, he will have to curb his desire to court her or he may not be able to handle it all.

With a beauty praising him, Han Fei is at a loss as to what to do, and doesn't even know where to put his hands.

Ji Yanran seems to have eyes only for Han Fei, and she said gently, "Mister's philosophy about governing a country with 'law', 'techniques' and 'power',

suggesting that people acts with one thing in mind which is to achieve gains while avoiding punishment, so the law must come into play if anyone commits any unwanted actions. It indeed looks right into the problem and is food for thought.”

Han Fei was at a greater loss for words and can only keep nodded his head, which makes others feel bad for him.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that if he can transplant his knowledge into his own brain, he might be able to enjoy the company of a beauty tonight.

Zou Yan laughed loudly, and after Ji Yaran and everyone else’s attention was diverted to him, said confidently, “With Master Han’s knowledge, your King will certainly appreciate it greatly, but why is it that there seems to be no improvement in your country’s cause to take over the world?”

Xiang Shaolong secretly cursed, Zou Yan was too much to rub salt on Han Fei’s wounds like that.

A look of anger and embarrassment flashed through Han Fei’s face but he was unable to speak further.

Obviously Ji Yanran admires Han Fei for his talent so she helped him out by saying, “An intelligent man needs a good master as well. Shang Yang, who is a Wei, did not accomplish anything in Wei as well. But when he went to Qin, his reforms improved the state greatly, does Mister Zou think that I have spoken rightly?”

Xiang Shaolong secretly complimented her retort, this lady is indeed remarkable. Just as he thought Zou Yan would be speechless, Zou Yan smiled slightly and said, "Of course Miss's words are very reasonable, but the point is not about the intellect of an individual. Besides an individual, there is still fate at work. Shang Yang was successful because of the situation, and he could not escape from the control of the 5 virtues. Only one who truly understands the 5 elements: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth and how they interact with each other will be able to grasp the changes of luck determined by Heaven."

Han Fei gave a cold snort, and his words came out a little smoother as he said, "What Mister Zou said... said... is unconvincing, then.... then are we supposed to... sit and wait for fate, and don't have to do anything else?"

His words sound reasonable as well, but the way he stuttered them out, it just doesn't sound as convincing.

Zou Yan is a good debater and he chortled, "Of course that's not the case. Once we can grasp Heaven's plans, we will be able to foretell the future and know the aim and direction where we should work on. Let's say digging a well for example, only when we know where the source of water is will we not waste our efforts in vain."

Han Fei was so furious his face turned red but he could not find a retort, or maybe he doesn't know how to express it. Xiang Shaolong felt great pity for him and wished that he can find some paper and brush so that he can write down his opinions.

Applause was heard, it turned out to be Xiao Weimou clapping in agreement.

Ji Yanran looked towards Xiao Weimou and raised her brow, asking, "This gentleman is..."

Xiao Weimou puffed out his chest, like an animal looking for a mate and said loudly, "I am Xiao Weimou from the state of Qi, I wonder if Miss have heard of me?"

Ji Yanran was enlightened, "So it's Mister Wei who advocates learning from beasts. May I ask, if men and beasts are the same, won't the world be thrown immediately into chaos?"

Now that Xiao Weimou has a chance to show off his knowledge in front of this beauty, how can he give up this chance so easily, so he smiled and said "Miss has lived mostly in the city, naturally you would not understand the world of animals. The wilderness has been my teacher for many years and I have observed the lives of beasts and birds and have concluded that only if we go with nature's flow will we not betray Heaven's decree. We can enjoy the life given to us under the greater law of nature. If we were to try and suppress our nature, it will only cause more harm than good and will make one become a hypocrite whose thoughts are not in conjunction with one's actions."

Ji Yanran looked at him with concentration, her expression showing that she's thinking about his words. Xiang Shaolong secretly thought oh no, this beauty is obviously very curious about things and very easily attracted by new and unique theories. If Xiao Weimou was to possess her, he would feel



the pain and unfairness of it, so he can't help but blurt out, "How can man and beasts be the same? Even different animals have different ways of living."

Xiao Weimou laughed coldly, "They can live differently, but their nature remains the same."

Naturally Xiang Shaolong will not show any courtesy towards him so he stared at him and said smilingly, "The difference between man and animals, is that we are not restricted by our innate abilities and desires; we can even sacrifice our own precious lives for the greater good. Animals walk on all fours, but we can stand up and because we need not use our hands to walk, they've become nimble and can make things like this house and all other necessities. Do animals have that ability?"

Obviously Xiao Weimou has done some research on this question so he mocked in reply, "You're talking about abilities, not innate nature. Birds can fly but can humans fly? Fishes can live underwater but can humans live underwater?"

Xiang Shaolong is definitely not a philosopher, but now that he's spoken, he cannot back down and have to forge his way through, "I am talking about innate ability. Because human brains are different from animals, we can think and reflect. Besides food, clothing and lodging, we also need mental stimulation; but for animals everything is about survival, they sleep after eating and mate when the time is right. Animals in nature are at a loss and can only react but man can fight against nature and defeat nature. That's because man has a different innate nature, we know how to improve and

expand, that's how we are now above animals."

Xiang Shaolong's not very excellent argument is widely known in the 21st century, but for the people in this era, it's a new idea and this made Ji Yanran immediately change her opinion of him.

Obviously Xiao Weimou has never thought of this question and he replied angrily, "What's the difference, I've seen both animal and human brains, they're all just made of tissues and flesh!"

Xiang Shaolong chortled, "You have just spoken about the greatest difference between humans and animals. Would animals analyze the difference between their brains and human brains?"

For a moment Xiao Weimou was dumbstruck, fury flared in his eyes and he wished he could tear Xiang Shaolong alive.

Although Zou Yan does not agree with Xiao Weimou's wild theory that humans should emulate animals, but they're both from the State of Qi and he does want to put Xiang Shaolong down in front of Ji Yanran. Therefore, he tried to pick a bone from an egg and retorted, "Brother Xiang earlier said that the difference between humans and animals is that we can stand up, then gorillas and monkeys all can stand and walk, how do you explain that?"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, and thought to himself that he can't possibly explain to them about evolution. Luckily his mind worked quickly and he had an idea, "The difference is in the construction of the brain." He touched his forehead and said, "Primates do not have forehead like us, so they can only

concentrate on immediate matters and won't think about tomorrow. But we can arrange and plan for tomorrow's matters, or even plan for matters a year or ten years from now."

In truth Xiang Shaolong's thoughts and arguments are already in a mess, but everyone knows that gorillas really do not have foreheads, so they all thought his reasoning logical.

Ji Yanran clapped and chuckled daintily, "How exciting, I've not heard such an interesting debate like this for a long time."

Her pretty eyes flitted towards Xiang Shaolong and she asked with a sweet smile, "This gentleman here, please forgive Yanran for not knowing who you are yet!"

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and secretly lamented. He could not tolerate it further earlier and thus came up with a nonsensical debate, and he hopes that she has not really taken a liking for him.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Chu Mohism's Fu Du**

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Ji Yanran asked about Xiang Shaolong's background and Prince Xinling hurriedly replied, "This is the No. 1 swordsman from the state of Zhao, Xiang Shaolong, remember that, Yanran."

Ji Yanran looked at Xiang Shaolong with a smile before turning her attention back to Han Fei. Although Xiang Shaolong breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that she has not 'taken a liking' to him, he can't help but also feel dejected, as if hurt. What a dilemma.

Tan Bang went closer to Xiang Shaolong and whispered, "This is Ji Yanran's rule, only she can ask a person's name and status. I've been here more than 20 times but she has never asked who I am. Shaolong, you've already left an impression on her."

Xiang Shaolong felt a man's pride surging up. He thought to himself that since he is not wooing her, why does he have to react to her moods but on seeing her only talking and laughing with Han Fei while the rest can only look on, he felt a sudden fury. Of course he felt a little left out and jealous as well so he stood up.

Prince Xinling was stunned, "Shaolong! What are you doing?"

Ji Yanran turned around and looked at him, a flash of light seems to pass her

pretty eyes, obviously she only realized his perfect physique and outstanding aura now.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be candid and said with a laugh, “Miss Ji is indeed a born beauty, it is my fortune to meet you, farewell!”

Ji Yanran was a little startled, then she seemed to understand his thinking and said with a slight smile, “How many days will Mister Xiang be staying in Daliang?”

Xiang Shaolong saw that she has no intention of making him stay at all and was secretly furious and felt a great loss of face but he pretended to be nonchalant and said simply, “Maybe a few more days!”

Prince Xinling and the rest had no choice but to stand up and leave with him.

On the way back to Xinling’s residence, Prince Xinling ranted in the carriage, “Shaolong do you know what a good opportunity you’ve missed? It’s rare that Ji Yanran is all smiles, for all you know she may play the zither and sing for the guests! Hai!” His words carry a great regret, obviously Ji Yanran’s singing and zither skills is extraordinary.

But what Xiang Shaolong is thinking of is the vicious look Xiao Weimou gave him when he left. This person is not one who has only brawns but no brains, and he has many capable men under him. He is indeed in a very dangerous position now.

After returning to Prince Xinling’s residence, he went to Lady Ya and she

immediately pulled him into the room and said, "I've made contact with Wu Zhuo and Cheng Xu and told them your instructions. Wu Zhuo wants me to tell you: He doesn't know if their spies in Daliang has been embroiled in Prince Xinling and Lord Longyang's fights because of this matter, so they have been in hiding and refused to make contact with him. Now we can only rely on ourselves. He also said he'll try to find a way to sneak into the city."

On hearing this Xiang Shaolong's mood turned for the worse and he collapsed on Lady Ya's rugs.

Lady Ya came up and helped remove his shoes, saying gently, "Ya'er has found the entrance to the underground tunnel, how are you going to reward me?"

Xiang Shaolong sat up in joy and pulled her into her arms. After giving her a good kiss on the lips, he said, "Lady is really capable!"

Lady Ya happily nibbled on his ears before telling him in detail the entrance to the tunnel. She sighed and continued, "Stealing 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual' may not be difficult, but the difficult part is leaving the state of Wei and avoiding the pursuing soldiers. 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual' is such an important item, Prince Xinling will surely check on it daily and once he find it gone, he'll naturally think that we're the ones who took it."

Xiang Shaolong also felt this to be a headache.

Right at this time Prince Xinling sent someone to summon him over immediately.

The guard led him to the inner hall which he had overheard Prince Xinling and his sister's conversation the other night, and after they were all seated, Prince Xinling said seriously, "An Li has given his imperial edict, he wants you to send Zhao Qian into the Palace the day after. That night he will throw a feast to welcome you as the ambassador."

Xiang Shaolong felt a lurk in his heart, he knows the crucial time is about to come.

Prince Xinling lowered his voice, "Lord Longyang will use the excuse to exchange pointers about swordplay to kill you. The person who will fight will certainly be that Xiao Weimou, in that way An Li and Lord Longyang need not be responsible because Xiao Weimou is a guest from the state of Qi."

Xiang Shaolong secretly lamented, if it's a proper duel with Xiao Weimou, chances of him winning are really slim. Just based on arm strength alone, he's already on the losing end.

Prince Xinling said quietly, "Lord Longyang hates you to the core right now, he's definitely not going to let you leave Daliang alive and because he has the backing of the King, I'm afraid even I cannot protect you. Shaolong do you have any plans?"

Xiang Shaolong was secretly cursing Prince Xinling but he sighed and said, "What can I do? I can only take one step at a time."

Prince Xinling sized him up for a moment before taking a deep breath and

said, "If Shaolong wants to avoid the calamity and at the same time enjoy endless riches, there is only one way. Do you want to know?"

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, "It's coming!" But he pretended to be attracted and said, "Please advice!"

Prince Xinling said, "It is to kill An Li that useless King and Lord Longyang."

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be shocked and exclaimed, "What?"

Prince Xinling said coldly, "A man must be vicious at times, since he's merciless, I need not show any kindness. I have men around An Li as well and we can hide the weapons in the Palace. As soon as you kill An Li, my men can immediately take out the weapons and kill Lord Longyang and the rest. When I ascend the throne, and with your great help, we'll take the opportunity when Qin is powerless to invade east to unify the 3 states. By then won't the world be ours? You can kill Zhao Mu for revenge as well, or else it'll be a dead end for you when you return to Zhao anyway."

The future he painted is indeed very attractive but Xiang Shaolong knows they're all lies. He nodded his head, "This truly is the only way, but King An Li will certainly have personal bodyguards and I cannot carry my weapon openly, how can I kill him?"

Prince Xinling saw that he did not object at all, his eyes gleamed with excitement as he said, "I had planned to hide a dagger under your table, but it's not that appropriate. Now that I guessed that Xiao Weimou will challenge you during the feast, then after you defeat Xiao Weimou, while accepting An



Li's congratulations, you can surprise and kill him. You can also create some chaos with your swordplay and we'll have the chance to strike. At the same time my men will attack the Palace and we need not worry the plan will fail."

Xiang Shaolong thought what if I'm killed by Xiao Weimou instead? He had an idea, if he doesn't take this chance to gain more advantages, he'd be a fool. So he said with a straight face, "As long as I have nothing to worry, Shaolong will give his life to you and try my best."

Prince Xinling furrowed his brow, "What do you mean by nothing to worry?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "It's Lady Ya and Zhao Qian, if they can leave Daliang, I will not have to worry and can do what needs to be done."

This is called blackmail. Of course he knows Prince Xinling cannot let Zhao Qian go but he's not afraid of letting Lady Ya leave because the day after, whether the assassination is successful or not, he can still instruct his men to get Lady Ya back.

As expected Prince Xinling said, "Zhao Qian can never leave, because you have to send her to the Palace. As for Lady Ya? Since Shaolong has this request, I will certainly do my best."

Xiang Shaolong was relieved of half his load and said, "The King is not going to let Zhao Qian become the Crown Princess at all, then why is he still inviting her into the Palace?"

Prince Xinling sighed, "Shaolong you're too naïve. An Li can easily let Zhao

Qian die mysteriously, then announce to the world that she died of illness and send her body back to Zhao. The King of Zhao will not be able to do anything to him. This may be too extreme, but it's the best plan An Li can come up with as a last resort."

Xiang Shaolong felt his whole body run cold on hearing this, which increased his determination to save the beauty.

Prince Xinling said, "As soon as you kill An Li, won't all problems be solved?"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head, "That's just the way I am, I do not wish implicate others in whatever I do. If Zhao Ya and Zhao Qian are not around, I will take responsibility for everything that I do, even if I fail and get captured I will not betray you. But once I think that I may implicate them, I'm afraid I will not find the courage to strike, then that'll be terrible."

There's nothing Prince Xinling can do to him and he suppressed his anger and nodded his head, "Let me think about this, there surely will be a solution."

When Xiang Shaolong heard him say this, he was secretly overjoyed. He remembered that Wu Zhuo mentioned he will be trying to sneak into the city, so he said, "In order not to let An Li become suspicious, I'd better not coop myself up in your residence these few days. I should walk around outside, then all the more An Li will not be on guard against me."

Prince Xinling furrowed his brows, "How can you do that, Lord Longyang will find someone to deal with you."

Xiang Shaolong laughed, “He’s not that stupid. After seeing how easily I killed Sha Xuan, and now that Xiao Weimou is helping him, can’t he wait another 2 days? I’m also doing this for you, hoping that the plan can succeed more easily.”

Because Prince Xinling needs his help, he does not want to go against his request too much so he sighed and said, “What other requests do you have? I’ve just received a few dancers from Chu who are excellent dancers and singers. Let me send 2 of them for your enjoyment!”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that it’s still an unknown whether he can stay alive, where can he find the mood to have fun with beauties? He said seriously, “I should not be going near women these 2 days so that I can maintain my best stamina. Hei! If I can kill An Li, even if you do not offer me beauties, I’ll ask you for them anyway!”

A teasing look flashed past Prince Xinling’s eyes as he chortled, “If the plan succeeds, there’s no problem even if you want the Empress or Princesses of Wei to accompany you.”

The 2 of them exchanged looks, and both laughed, each harboring their own motives.

Xiang Shaolong left Prince Xinling’s inner residence and walked towards Lady Ya’s Flying Clouds Chamber and as he was passing by the woods, a maid hurriedly brushed past him and stuffed something into his hands. Xiang Shaolong was still in a state of surprise as he took the thing when the maid increased her speed and darted into the woods. Because she kept her head

lowered, he didn't even manage to catch a good look at her.

Xiang Shaolong opened his hand, it turns out to be a nicely folded little handkerchief and when he opened it, a delicate map was drawn on it with a few tiny words at the side which read, "Waiting for gentleman at the Windy Bridge, meeting from Shen Mou\* hour. Ji Yanran."

\*Shen Mou – time between 3pm to 7pm

Xiang Shaolong was feeling perplexed and taking a closer look at the map, it shows the direction to that Windy Bridge from Prince Xinling's residence.

Ha! This woman really spared a lot of thought into this, to actually use such a method to date him, obviously because she does not want others to know. He didn't expect her to put up such a haughty and proud front, but in fact she is also thirsting for men.

His heart immediately started burning, but he remembered his dangerous situation now and sighed. He sat down in a small pavilion in the garden, contemplating whether to go for the appointment.

Footsteps were heard and a guard rushed over and said, "Master invites Sir over!"

Xiang Shaolong was surprised and followed the guard back into the inner hall to see Prince Xinling.

Prince Xinling exclaimed happily, "Shaolong is really capable, Yanran just sent

someone over with a verbal message and invited you and me to her abode tonight at the Mou\* hour to continue with the debate we had today. Obviously she has a very good impression of you, later I will tell someone to send you there!”

\*Mou – time between 5pm to 7pm

Xiang Shaolong was startled and secretly thought what a close shave.

So that handkerchief earlier was a trap, this is the real thing. He was really careless to have almost been duped, mainly because he was too confident about his charm and he can't help but feel shame and guilt.

Prince Xinling saw that he has a strange expression and asked surprisingly, “Is Shaolong unhappy? Everyone in Daliang finds it an honor if they can attend Yanran's banquet.”

Xiang Shaolong was just pondering who could be the one who wants to harm him and he answered with a bitter smile, “I'd better not go, in case I get distracted.”

Prince Xinling laughed, “Don't be so nervous, and don't think that Yanran will fall for you so easily. Your theory was interesting today, that's why her interest was a little piqued! If you don't go it will arouse the suspicions of others instead.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “You mentioned earlier that you'll tell someone to send me there, are you not going as well?”

Prince Xinling sighed, “She invited me only because it’s basic courtesy to do so, but her target is you. Go! If you miss Yanran’s banquet, even I will think it’s a great loss to you!”

Actually Xiang Shaolong really wants to meet this unique beauty again and his departure today was due to a man’s ego. Since now Prince Xinling is encouraging him, he made up his mind and said, “I can go on my own, and at the same time I can take a walk around as well.”

Prince Xinling agreed with a smile.

When Xiang Shaolong returned to Flying Clouds Chamber, Zhao Qian and Zhao Ya were chatting and when they saw him return, naturally they were full of smiles and overjoyed.

He saw that Zhao Qian was around and dared not reveal the conversation he had with Prince Xinling earlier, afraid that he would scare this weak princess.

Lady Ya seems to understand and said with a smile, “Come! Princess! Let us serve Xiang Lang while he bathe!”

Although Zhao Qian doesn’t mind being cozy with Xiang Shaolong, or even let him paw her, but she has never tried being naked with him. She blushed immediately and ran away.

Lady Ya then pulled him towards the bath.

While Xiang Shaolong was frolicking with the beauty in the water, he told her

about Prince Xinling's plan for him to assassinate the King of Wei.

Lady Ya felt her body turn cold, even though Xiaozhao and the rest of the maids kept pouring in hot water, it did not help. She exclaimed in alarm, "The day after is so soon! What shall we do?"

Xiang Shaolong replied, "We definitely cannot proceed with the plan to assassinate the King of Wei. No matter if it succeeds or not, I will not be able to live, so the only way out now is to find out how to steal 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual' and then run away from this place safely with the whole group."

Lady Ya looked dejected, "That's easy for you to say, this place is where the Weis are at their strongest. Both the King of Wei and Prince Xinling has the city heavily guarded so how can we escape when each step of the way is fraught with difficulties?"

Xiang Shaolong held her tightly and sniffed her face before replying, "Don't worry! Prince Xinling made a show of pretense and said he will let you and Cheng Xu leave, because if not I will refuse to execute his assassination plot. The question is how can you avoid his pursuit, and we must also consider that he might hide things from me and secretly escort all of you to somewhere else."

Lady Ya burrowed her head into his arms and said, "He'll definitely do that. Besides how can I bear to leave you? We'll die together if need be."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "This time it's my turn to disallow you to utter the word 'die', trust me!" He paused and continued, "Ya'er is an expert at

stealing information and this time you're here especially to steal 'Lu Gong's Secret Manual. I'm sure you had something planned out!"

Lady Ya replied, "Of course I made plans! I just didn't expect this to be a trap! I followed the scroll that Guo Zhong obtained which shows the drawings of how the cloud ladder is made and with that, made a silk scroll. As long as we can steal the real 'Secret Manual', Xiaozhao, the maids and I, the 8 of us working together, I'm confident we'll be able to copy a large portion of the scroll and make it look authentic. If Prince Xinling were to flip only a section of the scroll when he's checking it, he'll definitely not find out that we've done something to it. But we need at least 10 days."

Xiang Shaolong had a bright idea, "Since that is the case, why don't you use just one night, make a rough copy of one section of the scroll and cut the rest of it out and replace it with blank copies, then it'll be even better to trick Prince Xinling with."

Lady Ya hugged him happily and kissed him. She complimented him with a sigh, "Ya'er is so silly, I didn't even think of such a good idea." But her mood immediately turned sullen, "But how can we leave Wei? If Prince Xinling keeps you and Qian'er behind, there's no use even if we manage to escape successfully."

Xiang Shaolong replied, "Heaven will always leave a way out for man, we will certainly find a good plan to achieve both ends."

Lady Ya's pretty eyes shone, "Heaven will always leave a way out for man, achieve both ends, Xiang Lang's words are always so interesting and sounds



good as well, Ya'er really loves you!"

Xiang Shaolong said, "Now let me see if I can bump into Wu Zhuo. This person is smart and brave and familiar with the situation in Wei as well, he'll certainly think of an appropriate plan. I will be attending Ji Yanran's feast tonight, but I will slip back secretly. Now tell me quickly the entrance to the secret tunnel."

After the 2 of them discussed the finer details, Xiang Shaolong prepared himself and left.

He had just stepped out of Prince Xinling's residence into the street when a person rushed over and asked, "Does Commander remember me?"

Xiang Shaolong looked over in surprise and felt that this person looks familiar. He took a while to remember he is Pu Bu, one of the famed family warriors under Prince Shaoyuan, who is on the same status as Xu Hai, the one he killed. He cried out happily, "So it's Brother Pu Bu."

Pu Bu pulled him into a restaurant and after sitting down, said quietly, "Most of us have given up on Prince Shaoyuan, and we do not wish to live amongst the conniving and unreliable Weis. We hope to follow Commander and do great things."

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows, "But I'm having problems preserving my own life now. Both Zhao and Wei are not the place for me, if you follow me, I'm afraid you might even lose your lives."

Pu Bu replied, “There’s 48 of us, we’re all brave men who are not afraid of death. We have thought over the various problems before making up our minds to follow Commander. Just looking at how Commander cares so much for our well-being, we’ll be willing to work hard for Commander. With your capability, you will achieve something great sooner or later, please accept us!”

Xiang Shaolong had an idea, “Aren’t you living in Prince Xinling’s residence?”

Pu Bu replied, “A group of us is staying in the residence with Prince Shaoyuan, while the rest is staying in a mercenary house nearby for the time being. We’re just waiting for Commander’s instructions now.”

Xiang Shaolong has learnt his lesson and thought to himself that he cannot be so trusting of this person for now. After they agreed on how they could contact each other, he asked, “Are all of you from Zhao?”

Pu Bu shook his head, “We have people from everywhere, please don’t worry! We truly respect your character and military abilities and have no other intentions.”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “All right! Go back to the mercenary house first and wait for my commands.”

Pu Bu left happily.

He had just stepped out when Wu Zhuo took over his seat.

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and hurriedly discussed with Wu Zhuo the plans secretly.

After he parted with Wu Zhuo, the sun was still up. He saw that it's still early so he might as well follow the map's instructions and go to that Windy Bridge. The bridge is indeed as the name suggests, with cold wind blowing past it. Not a lot of people crossed the bridge and those who did were all in a hurry.

There are forests at the 2 ends of the bridge, with very few houses around. It's very quiet and secluded, an ideal place to kill someone.

Reasonably Lord Longyang and Xiao Weimou won't go an extra step to lay a trap to kill him. His other enemy Prince Shaoyuan won't be so dumb as to spoil his uncle's grand plan, so who could be the one who tried to lure him here?

Once he thought about this, he was very curious and since the enemy is not here yet, he hid under the bridge first. Using the steel hooks, he tied himself securely beneath the bridge so that even if someone were to check under the bridge, they won't notice his presence so easily.

Xiang Shaolong waited patiently and when the time for the appointment arrived, light footsteps could be heard on the bridge, as if his enemy is not wearing any shoes.

Xiang Shaolong thought that it's really a close shave, if he really thought that the beauty had asked him out, he will definitely be in trouble now.

Someone above called out, “Juzi! I’m afraid Xiang Shaolong won’t be coming, we didn’t even see any trace of him while on the way here.”

Xiang Shaolong who was beneath the bridge was startled, could it be that the leader of Zhao Mohism, Yan Ping is here?

A rough voice replied, “How could that lad have seen through our trap? That’s really strange!”

Xiang Shaolong could tell that it’s not Yan Ping’s voice and felt even more troubled, the group above would either be from ‘Qi Mohism’ or ‘Chu Mohism’. He did not expect their news to be so accurate and guessed that the Juzi Token is with him. Trouble really comes one after another.

The person earlier asked, “Juzi! What should we do now?”

That Juzi laughed coldly, “Does he think that we can’t find him as long as he hides in Prince Xinling’s residence? Others may be afraid of Prince Xinling but would I, Fu Du be afraid of him?”

His subordinate asked quietly, “I heard that he will be attending the King of Wei’s feast the day after. Lord Longyang and Xiao Weimou will definitely not let him off so if we want to strike, there’s only tonight and tomorrow night.”

Fu Du was silent for a moment before replying slowly, “We still need to prepare, so let’s strike tomorrow night! If possible, we might as well kill Prince Xinling as well so that when our Great Chu deals with the Weis in future, it’ll be easier.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad he came and overheard this big plot, and at the same time found out that the other party is from Chu Mohism. He can't help but sincerely thank Heavens.

The other party must have a spy, so they would know the situation in Prince Xinling's residence and the defense strength. Even so they actually have the audacity to enter the residence to kill and plunder, so obviously they are quite strong. But since he is aware of the other party's plot now, this would turn out entirely differently.

## Chapter 3

### Debating Heroes

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When Xiang Shaolong arrived at Ji Yanran's little house by the lake, there were already 10 odd elaborate horse carriages outside the door, the attendance a lot larger than this afternoon's.

After he gave his name to the guard, he saw one of the maids he met this morning coming out to welcome him and led him past the building which he met Ji Yanran this afternoon. She was carrying a lantern as she led the way and went through a small path in the woods. His eyes suddenly brightened, in large building with a lot of colorful lanterns hanging on it appeared in front, and he seems to hear people talking in it.

Xiang Shaolong can't help but ask the pretty maid, "Which other guests are here tonight?"

The pretty maid replied nonchalantly, "The guests tonight are all specially invited by Miss, besides Master Han Fei, Zou Yan and Xiao Weimou whom Mister Xiang has seen today, there's also Lord Longyang, Philosopher Xu Jie and General Bai Gui."

Xiang Shaolong sucked in his breath, this Ji Yanran is really something. Bai Gui is the person that Lady Pingyuan is remarrying, so naturally he's someone great while Lord Longyang is a favorite of the King of Wei and yet they all came for the event. Obviously her position in Wei is extremely elevated as

well. Although he doesn't know who that Xu Jie is, he must be someone famous as well.

He was perplexed as well, Lord Longyang should not be interested in women, so if he's not here because of Ji Yanran's beauty, what else can he be here for? Could it be to humiliate him to appease his anger?

When it comes to learning, he won't be able to catch up with these scholars even if he's chasing them on a horse, so to ask him to speak is akin to embarrassing him on the spot. Therefore, he can't help but feel uneasy.

When he stepped into the hall, he saw the table laid out and all the others the maid talked about were already here, all sitting back on the soft rugs and sitting comfortably around the table.

Another 2 pretty maids came forward and helped him remove his outer cloak and shoes. Luckily it is winter now and he's wearing a thick cotton outfit so unless one reaches out to touch him, they won't realize his equipment hidden in his clothes.

Stoves were lit in the room, making it as warm as spring.

Lord Longyang is still behaving 'languidly' and even proactively introduced him to the others.

That Bai Gui is the oldest, at least 50 years old but very robust with gleaming eyes, giving others an impression that he is very smart. And he behaved haughtily towards Xiang Shaolong, only giving him a cold acknowledgement

before turning towards Philosopher Xu Jie who looks like a typical scholar and spoke quietly to each other privately.

Xiang Shaolong was seated between Hai Fei and Zou Yan, the seat beside Han Fei is still empty, obviously it's Ji Yanran's main seat, followed by Lord Longyang, Bai Gui, Xu Jie and Xiao Weimou.

Xiang Shaolong saw that he need not sit opposite Xiao Weimou and face him so he felt a little more comfortable.

Zou Yan behaved quite coldly towards Xiang Shaolong and only gave a brief greeting before talking to Xiao Weimou, who is from Qi like him, totally ignoring Xiang Shaolong.

Instead it was Han Fei who took a liking to Xiang Shaolong because of his help this afternoon and although he is not a very good talker, it still gave Xiang Shaolong a little warmth in this 'icy atmosphere'.

Ji Yanran only appeared now, wearing a white brocade robe and absolutely glowing, immediately capturing the attention of everyone. Even that Lord Longyang was no exception, he looked dumbfounded and Xiao Weimou was almost drooling while Han Fei blushed. Although their reactions were all different, they were all attracted by her.

Ji Yanran looked at everyone with a smile, her clear and languid eyes flitted around and even Xiang Shaolong felt as if his soul had been enchanted. Her body emitted a fragrance after her bath, giving rise to other thoughts.



She had just sat down when she said with a smile, “Mister Xiang will have to be punished with a drink first, how can you leave before the end of the meeting this afternoon?”

Everyone immediately followed her wishes and agreed.

Naturally at this point in time there’ll be pretty maids pouring wine and serving delicious food.

After Xiang Shaolong gladly exchanged a toast with her, Ji Yanran’s enchanting eyes flitted around the dining table and chatted cleverly, making everyone at the feast feel at home. However, she seems to be more interested in Han Fei, Zou Yan and Philosopher Xu Jie, talking and smiling to them more, and not paying much attention to the rivals Xiang Shaolong and Xiao Weimou.

The truth is Xiang Shaolong has absolutely no clue about their conversation regarding poetries and song, and there’s no way he can interrupt to show off even if he wanted to.

After they’ve eaten and drank, and with the urging of everyone, Ji Yanran ordered her flute to be brought out and played a tune for all.

Xiang Shaolong doesn’t know the tune she played but he does know that her skills with the flute is flawless and at the peak and can’t help but be drawn into the music like the rest of them, totally intoxicated by the melody.

After Ji Yanran finished her tune and everyone sincerely complimented her,

she smiled and asked Xiao Weimou, “Mister Xiao please forgive Yanran for being rude, but I would like to boldly ask you a question.”

Maybe Xiao Weimou has been affected by the atmosphere, or maybe he’s trying to get into Ji Yanran’s good books and gain her affection so his speech is a lot more refined and said gently, “As long as it’s Miss who asks it, I will be most glad to answer any question of yours.”

Ji Yanran smiled enchantingly and said, “The difference between humans and beasts is whether they have a sense of shame, what does Mister think?”

Everyone knows that the show is about to begin and stopped eating and drinking, quietly listening to their conversation.

Before Xiang Shaolong came he thought that Ji Yanran had changed her mind about him but now that he saw she is treating him so coldly, he was about to find an excuse to slip back and steal the ‘Secret Manual’ so that Lady Ya and the 8 maids can make a copy. Therefore he was not really concentrating on their conversation.

Obviously Xiao Weimou came well prepared and said with a smile, “I’m afraid Miss has misunderstood my meaning. I do not mean there’s no difference between man and beasts at all, it’s just that some innate nature, like the desire to live and procreate, is the same! That’s why there are many things worth learning from animals, for example animals will not lie, they’re more honest than us. Man should be true to their own nature before they can really enjoy life.” He continued with a cold snort towards Xiang Shaolong, “What insight does Brother Xiang has about my theory?”

Xiang Shaolong was thinking about Chu Mohism's Fu Du at that time so when he heard the words he was startled and said, "What? Oh! I don't have any views on that."

Everyone, including Ji Yanran, were immediately stunned and revealed looks of contempt.

Xiang Shaolong was laughing bitterly to himself that he's not a debater so even if he has heard what he said, he won't be able to argue well. Luckily he has decided not to woo Ji Yanran, so it's no big deal if he loses favor with her or not.

Philosopher Xu Jie looked at Xiang Shaolong scornfully before saying, "There's a big problem with Mister Xiao's words. The difference between man and beasts lies exactly in their innate nature. Man are kind by nature that's why they show kindness to others; beasts, in order to fill their stomachs, have no such compassion and will willfully kill and eat other animals, sometimes even their own kinds are not let off. If man were to be so bad as to learn from beasts, won't the world be thrown into chaos?"

Xiao Weimou is an unrefined man and now that this scholar in Confucianism is butting into his theory, he felt a loss of face and asked coldly, "Will man not kill other animals? What is Philosopher Xu eating now then?"

Xu Jie laughed, "This is exactly the difference between those bloodthirsty beasts and us. We only eat domesticated animals, will beasts know how to do this?"

Xiao Weimou is obviously not his match and for a moment was dumbfounded.

Xu Jie won in his first attack and was filled with pride in front of Ji Yanran, so he turned his attack towards Han Fei, “I have read Master Han’s great works as well and the theories are interesting. A pity that you committed the same mistake as your Teacher Xun Kuang, which is to think that men are evil by nature, that’s why they do not know the great meaning of changing the people with benevolent policies. They use punishments to rule the country and bully the people. With Master’s abilities, to think that you were actually misled into following the wrong path, it’s really a pity.”

Hai Fei was stunned for a moment as he did not expect Xu Jie to be so rude as to criticize him so disrespectfully. He is furious and could think of the retorts to make but the more angry he is, the worse is his stutter and he was unable to speak at all.

Lord Longyang, Bai Gui and Zou Yan all have an icy smile on their faces, ‘happily’ watching him being humiliated.

Ji Yanran raised her delicate brows and although she felt bad for Han Fei, she was impatient about his inability to speak as well.

Xiang Shaolong, as an outsider, suddenly understood the meaning behind Ji Yanran’s hosting of this dinner tonight; which is to find a good way to govern a country. That’s why she looked at Han Fei in a different light and also invited the important people in Wei so that they can accept new theories and ideals.

Xu Jie saw that Han Fei was unable to defend himself at all and became even more proud and insolent, saying “As for you who denied the methods of the previous Kings, it shows that you are forgetting your roots. It’s just like building a house, we must first have a good foundation. Without a foundation, the house will not be able to withstand the weather, and this foundation is the models left behind by our learned ancestors.”

These words are targeting at Han Fei’s theory that there is no such thing as unchanging policies in governing a country. Han Fei feels that protecting the old ways is not proactive at all, so one should not follow old ways blindly but act appropriately according to different situations at different times. Such thinking is of course more advanced than those Confucians who advocates protecting the old ways, but a pity Han Fei is not eloquent enough to say it out.

Xiang Shaolong saw that Han Fei was so furious his vein was almost bursting. He couldn’t bear the sight and blurted out, “Nonsense!”

He’d just spoken out when he realized he’s in trouble. Indeed everyone’s attention turned towards him, and Xu Jie looked at him impertinently and said with a cold laugh, “It turns out that besides leading soldiers to war, Commander Xiang has some insight about governing a country as well. I am willing to listen to your lofty ideals.”

Xiang Shaolong can feel Ji Yanran’s pretty eyes staring at him, and thought to himself how can he possibly lose face in front of this beauty, so he forged ahead, “Time moves forward, for example in the past wars were fought mainly with war carriages but now it’s fought with a mixture of steeds, foot

soldiers and carriages. So obviously blindly relying on old ways will not work out.”

Ji Yanran sighed disappointedly, “Mister Xiang seems to be a little unclear about Philosopher Xu’s point. What he is referring to is principles, not methods. It’s just like a war is a still war, just different ways of fighting it.”

Lord Longyang smiled coquettishly, “Brother Xiang, your swordplay may be excellent but it seems that you have not studied a lot. Now we’re debating with Master Han the difference between governing by ‘virtue’ and by ‘legalism’!”

Xu Jie said loudly, “Governing by virtue, you will be like the North Star, staying in its place while other stars move around you.” He paused and recited again, “People who are governed legalistically and controlled by punishment will avoid crime but have no sense of shame. People who are governed through virtue and controlled through propriety will have a sense of shame and correct themselves.”

These are famous Confucianism sayings, meaning that the way to govern a country is to use virtue as a foundation so that the people can be educated and the country peaceful. It has a totally different basis from legalism.

Xiang Shaolong was not interested and felt that it’s better he find an opportunity to slip away soon. All this talk about governing with virtues, he’s not even clear about the theories behind it. It’s better that he leave early to avoid embarrassment to himself so he stood up and offered his farewells.

Everyone was shocked. They did not expect that the debate has not even properly started and this person is already running away.

Ji Yanran looked at him unhappily, "If Mister Xiang is going to slip away after just saying a few words like you did this afternoon, Yanran will be very unhappy."

Lord Longyang has not made enough 'fun' of him yet, so how can he bear to let him leave. He also spoke up to make him stay.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that he can't be bothered if Ji Yanran is happy or not because to her, he's just an unimportant guest whose presence will not be missed. He was about to leave when he realized that Han Fei was tugging at his sleeve seriously so his heart softened and he sat down.

Ji Yanran exclaimed happily, "Now that is how a man should be. Mister Xiang seems to be deliberately holding back your opinions, Yanran really wants to hear your theories!"

Xiang Shaolong laughed bitterly to himself, thinking that Miss Ji really thought too highly of him. Compared to the rest, he's just a bumpkin, where can he find theories to expound.

Xu Jie has been on the upper hand the whole night and secretly thought that he may be able to gain the liking of the beauty, so he will not let go of the chance to show off. He forced an attack and said, "In Mister Xiang's opinion, which is better, governing by virtues or legalism?"

Xiang Shaolong saw the look of contempt in his eyes and was furious. He decided to forge ahead and said, "It's not a question of better or worse, but a question of whether it works or not. Governing by virtue is purely idealism, if everyone in the world is a saint and there are no evil men, then everyone will obey the law without the use of any methods. But the truth is, the situation is obviously not like that, and it will never become a fact, that's why we need a set of laws and guidelines that everyone is aware of to restrict everyone and make them obey. Only after this is achieved can we talk about virtues and respect. That's all I have to say."

Everyone was shocked. To someone from the 21st century, this is a logic that everyone understands, but for people in that era, this is even more in-depth and refreshing than Han Fei's theory of legalism.

Ji Yanran's pretty eyes lighted up and she scrutinized Xiang Shaolong afresh, chewing on his words.

Han Fei looked deep in thought, unconsciously nodding his head.

Zou Yan was silent, as if he's thinking of some questions.

Naturally Xu Jie would not admit defeat so easily but he no longer belittles his opponent and he said with a straight face, "If a country is governed only by law, won't the person in power be able to suppress and bully the weaker ones with punishment?"

Bai Gui commented, "If the government loves propriety, the people will not dare to be disrespectful; if the government loves righteousness, the people



will not dare not to follow them; if the government loves trust, the people will respond with their emotions. This is the way a ruler should govern. If one were to prefer punishment, what would the people become? Mister Xiang please enlighten us.”

Xiang Shaolong chortled and after taking a long look at Ji Yanran, turned towards Bai Gui and Xu Jie and said, “That’s just because legalism is not thorough enough, to put the power solely in the hands of the ruler! If everyone is equal in front of the law, the son of heaven... heh.... The ruler who commits a mistake will face the same punishment as commoners. For example if anyone who kills someone without a reason will be punished, who would dare to kill randomly? I did not say we should discard propriety and righteousness, these should be the basic principle behind any law. The true way to govern a country is to combine governing by virtue and legalism. Absolute power will only result in absolute disintegration.”

When he talked about ‘the ruler will face the same punishment as commoners’, Ji Yanran went ‘Ah’ while Han Fei’s eyes immediately brightened. The others, including Xiao Weimou, all revealed looks of shock and alarm. Especially the last few words, is like a morning bell sounding, resonating deeply in everyone’s heart.

For the people living in this era where the rulers are supreme, this is indeed a mind shattering theory.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that that’s all the argument he can muster out, if he says some more there’s bound to be mistakes so he stood up and said, “I have already revealed all my worthless thoughts. Hei! I still have

something important to do, farewell!”

Ji Yanran furrowed her brows and said angrily, “Mister has just told us the most interesting part and you are leaving? Do you dislike Ji Yanran?”

Zou Yan forcefully dragged him back to his seat and laughed, “Commander Xiang has piqued my interest in talking! I would like to ask how such legalism which includes the ruler as well should work?”

Lord Longyang said, “Brother Xiang’s theory on governing a country is even more ideal than the governing by virtues which we talked about!”

Xiao Weimou laughed icily, “And more impractical as well!”

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly, “Yes! It will not work now but if we work towards this direction, one day there will be a situation where power is divided into 3, the legal system, law enforcers and government. The ruler will be chosen by the people and only then will there be... hei... French... ai! No, real live, equality and freedom.”

He almost wanted to blurt out about the French Revolution but luckily he caught himself in time and swallowed his words.

These words were even more earth shattering and everyone could not digest the information at once. For people who have been living such a long time under the absolute rule of the kings, this is such an unacceptable thought yet at the same time extremely exciting and refreshing.

Xiang Shaolong saw that everyone was furrowing their brows and thought what a better time to leave than this. He stood up and immediately walked far away from the table before bowing and saying, “I was speaking nonsense, please don’t take it to heart.” He turned around and left, ignoring Ji Yanran’s calls.

## Chapter 4

### Stealing the sky and exchanging the sun

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When Xiang Shaolong returned to Prince Xinling's residence, Ji Yanran's calls seems to be still ringing in his ears.

When every guest of hers is trying all means hoping to stay, he is the complete opposite, running away as if afraid that she will entwine him.

But this woman is indeed unique, when he first heard of her talent and beauty, he thought that she would be the melancholy type like Lin Daiyu\*, or those haughty beauties who keeps an arm's length away from everyone else. Only after he's seen her did he realize she's filled with a passion for life, always seeking facts, thirsting for a learned person to find out a good way to govern a country, or maybe to seek the perfect husband in her heart.

(\*Lin Daiyu – Character from dream of red chambers,  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin\\_Daiyu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lin_Daiyu))

But that person will certainly not be Xiang Shaolong.

For him now, he has no time and neither is it appropriate for him to start any relationship with any woman. He has to conserve all his energy to protect and save Lady Ya, Zhao Qian, the maids and the others, that is his responsibility. If he becomes distracted because of another beauty and made a mistake, he'll certainly regret it for the rest of his life.

He may be a flirt by nature but he has a strong sense of responsibility as well. Besides, he's deeply in love with them.

Making use of the light that was streaming out from the building, he made a big round and using his equipment, climbed up the dangerously sloping back mountain which was behind Prince Xinling's residence. He then easily slipped into the residence and from the description he got, came to the top of a tree next to a building.

This courtyard belongs to Prince Xinling's inner quarters so security is very tight. Occasionally fierce looking guard dogs can be seen patrolling with groups of men. Luckily he has sprinkled on him the powder that Lady Ya brought with her or else he would not be able to escape from these animals' sensitive noses.

Now it's almost 11pm at night, lights can still be seen in the building and he wondered who is not yet asleep.

According to Lady Ya this should be where Prince Xinling's family reside in so if there's someone down there, it'll be difficult for him to sneak into the secret tunnel quietly.

After waiting impatiently for more than half an hour, he could not take it anymore and decided to take the risk, because he does not have the time to continue waiting any longer.

He lifted up the treasure in his hand and activated the switch, the hook flew out 3 feet across and landed lightly on the roof, hooking it tightly.

He then slid over like a flying bird and landed quietly on the roof. He found a sure footing and flipped over the roof down to the balcony on the 2nd level, which was covered by bamboo, moved to the window and looked into the room.

It was an elaborately decorated room. Besides the curtains hanging lowly on the low bed, there was a dressing table and copper mirror and things usually found in a ladie's room. The lamp was brightly lit and from the bed the moans and pants of a man and woman coupling could be heard.

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself that since this is the entrance to the secret tunnel, the person staying here must be someone Prince Xinling trusts, maybe his beloved wife or concubines. If Prince Xinling wants accompaniment during the night, he can always summon the woman here and there's no need for him to 'travel' here. Could it be that his wife or concubine is having an affair?

But there is no need to think further. Just as he was about to flip one level down, he heard voices from down below. A group of patrol guards were downstairs and they actually stopped and were quietly talking.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting and after waiting for a while, those people downstairs still have no intention of leaving. He gritted his teeth, drew out a flying needle and poked it through the gap in the window, lightly flipping up the latch on the window. He pushed open the window and flipped into the room.

A gust of wind followed him into the room.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly alarmed and before he had a chance to close the window, a man's voice was heard from inside the curtained bed, "Zhichun you must have forgotten to close the window properly, look! That window is opened!"

The voice sounds familiar, it's actually Prince Shaoyuan.

The woman called Zhichun replied in surprise, "That's impossible, let me go and close it, the weather is really cold!"

Xiang Shaolong was startled. This room may be big but there's no place to hide. The low bed is not higher than a foot and he can't squeeze under it even if he wanted to. In his anxiety he had an idea, he rolled towards the candle, reached out his hand and extinguished the flame by pressing on the wick.

That Zhichun had just sat up and exclaimed with an 'Ah!', saying, "The wind has extinguished the candle!"

Xiang Shaolong dared not hesitate and rushed towards the door and tested it with a push. It opened immediately and he was overjoyed. Using the sounds of Zhichun moving around as a cover, he dashed out and closed the door.

It's an empty hall outside with a flight of stairs down, and there are 2 other rooms.

The sound of the door opening was heard behind him and Xiang Shaolong was startled. He rushed forward and managed to hide behind a screen in

time.

At this time a totally naked beauty came out from the room. She looks younger than 20 and looked delicate with fair skin and a voluptuous body, extremely captivating. When she walked her bosom bounced which made her even more alluring.

Zhichun walked towards the screen coyly.

Xiang Shaolong was alarmed and only now did he realize that at his feet there were chamber pots and such, used for relieving oneself and he hurriedly dashed out from the other side of the screen and lied flat on the ground so that the candle will not reflect his shadow. Right at this time Zhichun stepped behind the screen but he exited just as she entered so she did not manage to see him.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought what a close shave and crawled towards the stairs. When he heard twinkling sounds behind the screen, he went down.

Just as he reached the corner of the stairs, voices were heard from below, there were at least 4 men talking.

Xiang Shaolong stood at the corner stunned and lamented his luck. If he can't manage to steal the 'Secret Manual' tonight, it'll be even worse.

He turned around the corner and stuck his head out to look down towards the hall and saw 4 warriors sitting around a table chatting. If he were to walk down, no matter how careful he is, there's no way he can avoid them. He



was so nervous his heart almost stopped.

In his anxiety, he heard Zhichun's crisp voice call out, "Is there anyone still around?"

Someone replied and walked towards the stairs.

Xiang Shaolong secretly groaned. He's really stuck in the middle now with no way to advance or retreat, so he hardened his heart and pulled out a flying needle, his concentration wholly on the warrior who is walking towards the stairs and at the same time squeezed himself into the corner of the wall so that the other party won't be able to see him from afar.

The person replied as he walked, "What instructions does Lady has?"

Xiang Shaolong realized that Zhichun is actually one of the 2 concubines he brought with him from Zhao.

That warrior came to the stairs and came face to face with Xiang Shaolong and he cried out, "Ah!" It turned out to be the other expert family warrior who is of the same status as Pu Bu, Liu Chao.

Xiang Shaolong was about to throw out his flying needle but hurriedly stopped when he saw it was him.

Zhichun's voice called out, "Liu Chao! What's the matter."

Liu Chao collected his thoughts and after exchanging a look with Xiang

Shaolong, replied, “Nothing! I just happen to see a rat scurry past and was surprised.”

Women are most afraid of small animals like these and Zhichun is no exception so she called out, “Prince is hungry and Xiaoying and the rest are already asleep. Can I trouble you to go to the kitchen and get them to prepare some food.” After saying this she ran back into the room as if she’s running for her life.

Liu Chao came up and whispered, “We were just talking about Commander. Why is Commander here, is there anyway we can help.”

Xiang Shaolong made up his mind and told him about stealing the ‘Secret Manual’.

Liu Chao saw that Xiang Shaolong puts so much trust in him and replied happily, “Commander please wait for a moment!”

He went back and after informing the other 3 warriors, he asked Xiang Shaolong to come out.

Xiang Shaolong instructed one of them to go to the kitchen and order some food, then he searched the hall carefully first, followed by the rooms. He found the secret entrance to the tunnel under a rug.

Liu Chao said, “Commander, put your mind at ease and go down! We’ll keep a look out for you!”

Xiang Shaolong had an idea, “It’s best that you go down with me, if there’s a need you can put it back in its original position.”

Liu Chao gladly agreed and together they grabbed the copper rings and lifted up the stone slab and after walking down 10 odd flights of stone steps, came to the secret tunnel. One side of the tunnel leads towards Prince Xinling’s inner hall while the other end leads to the back of the mountain. Obviously it’s a secret tunnel that can give safe passage to escape from Prince Xinling’s residence because no one will expect that there will be an escape route at that dangerous mountain.

Liu Chao took a lantern and after illuminating the tunnel, the two of them walked towards the direction of Prince Xinling’s bedroom.

When they came to another set of stone stairs which led up, Xiang Shaolong stopped and carefully scrutinized and knocked on the walls of the tunnel and realized that there’s something different about one of the walls.

The two of them tried pushing but the wall did not move at all.

Xiang Shaolong had an idea, and started inspecting each brick and realized that one of them is slightly protruding. He tried pulling it with his strength and the brick came out immediately, revealing the keyhole inside.

The 2 of them were overjoyed and Xiang Shaolong took out his tools for picking locks and following Lady Ya’s instructions, opened the lock in no time at all.

When they pushed open the door and under the illumination from the lantern, the both of them were stunned. It turned out to be a treasure trove.

In the large underground stone room there were more than 10 chests of jewelry and money. They opened 2 of the chests and under the reflection of the lamp, the jade pieces, gold and silver all glittered and blinded.

Xiang Shaolong said quietly, “Don’t let the other 3 know about this until we have a plan to leave Daliang, then we’ll take a few pieces for our traveling expenses. Remember you must not have thoughts of greed. Men have died for wealth and we could even lose our lives.”

Liu Chao is indeed a heroic man and after this reminder, he replied sincerely, “Well spoken, Commander! I understand.” At the same time he felt growing respect for Xiang Shaolong as a person who is not easily moved by money.

Xiang Shaolong searched quickly and after some time he managed to find an even more secluded secret compartment at the corner of the wall and took out a rectangular metal box. He opened it, and indeed it is the ‘Lu Gong’s Secret Manual’ which was tightly wrapped in cloth that will prevent it from rot or moisture.

He unrolled the scroll for a look and was relieved, because the silk on the drawings were so old it’s turned yellow and it’s more than 30 meters long. It’s so thick and heavy that even if he’s Prince Xinling, he won’t be bothered to check the scroll from start to end every time. Therefore his plan is sure to work.

He took a closer look and saw that was full of drawings of various tools for attack and defense, with detailed instructions on materials used, the quantity needed and the process of making it. It's indeed breathtaking.

There's not much time left so the 2 of them left hurriedly.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, Lady Ya and the 8 maids were still hard at work. The sun is not yet up.

Lady Ya has already bounded the fake scroll with a section of the real scroll, and used some minerals and colorings to stain the sides of the scroll yellow. It looked so authentic, no wonder she's an expert in duplication.

Xiang Shaolong only had to work under the cover of night and take the 'Secret Manual' which only has the authentic front section, and easily slip it back into the secret room. This should be a very difficult task but because of Liu Chao's help, it became an easy job.

When he returned to Lady Ya's place, the sky is slowly brightening. Lady Ya and the rest were exhausted and were resting on the bed.

Xiang Shaolong hugged her and slept for a while until Prince Xinling sent someone to look for him. He hurriedly washed up and left.

Prince Xinling seems like he had not slept the whole night. Maybe he's trying to pretend to be on close terms because he received him in the side hall of the inner chambers. After they were seated he laughed and said, "Because of your matter, I did not sleep the whole of last night and I finally found an

appropriate arrangement.”

Right at this time a pretty maid came in to serve tea and Prince Xinling ordered, “I have things to discuss with Commander, no one is allowed to step in here!”

The pretty maid acknowledged the order and left.

Prince Xinling asked in passing, “Did you manage to stir the interest of Yanran last night, I heard Lord Longyang and Xiao Weimou went to the feast as well.”

Xiang Shaolong sighed, “Don’t talk about it! There’s no way I can butt in a word at such a gathering!”

Prince Xinling disagreed, “That’s not true, your ideas is very creative, even Tan Bang admires you!”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, what’s the use of admiring me when you’re still sacrificing me as a stepping-stone towards your success.

Prince Xinling saw that he was quiet and asked, “Has Shaolong taken breakfast?”

Xiang Shaolong rubbed his stomach and shook his head.

Prince Xinling cried out, “Attendants!” Then he slapped his own forehead and sighed, “I’m really muddleheaded, I just chased everyone away. You sit here for a while, I’ll go and instruct someone to bring breakfast.” He stood up and

left.

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and jumped up, firstly aiming towards that inner room, the one that looks like an office that was filled with scrolls and such. At the side there is a side door and outside there is a huge open-aired well and behind the well there is a place, which looks like a pool for bathing.

There's not much time so he pushed open the side door and indeed it is Prince Xinling's bedroom. He took a hurried look so naturally he cannot find the entrance to the underground tunnel.

He walked forward hurriedly and lifted up the rug on the bed for a look. The entrance to the secret tunnel appeared before him. The strange thing is that there is a copper pipe poking out from the ground towards the bed, and the other end is a dragon's head made of copper, looking like as exquisite design on the head of the bed.

Xiang Shaolong immediately felt cold sweat and hurriedly returned to the hall. Prince Xinling came back right at this time and was smiling, "Breakfast will be served shortly, come! Let me tell you my plan!"

But what Xiang Shaolong was thinking about was that copper pipe, it's obviously a listening device for the tunnel and the secret chamber. Noises from in there will travel through the pipe to Prince Xinling's bed and the design was intricate. Luckily he did not sleep last night, that's why he did not hear him moving around.

Prince Xinling said, "I will order someone to fake a document and will send it

to his Majesty today to let Zhao Ya and the rest of the entourage return to Zhao, leaving only you and Zhao Qian. Zhao Ya is my invited guest, so Lord Longyang has no right to object.”

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, you can say all you want now, with your power, letting them go is an easy task. At the same time he knows that the fact is he will not let a single person leave, but he’s just putting on a show. He pretended to be ecstatic, “That’s really great, but can we let them leave earlier?”

Prince Xinling first revealed a look of difficulty before saying, “If I can’t even do such a small thing, Shaolong will surely belittle me. All right! I will arrange for Lady Ya and the rest to leave the city this afternoon and meet up with your troops before departing immediately. Shaolong need not worry.”

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing to himself as he asked, “How do we solve Zhao Qian’s problem then?”

Prince Xinling replied, “I will send someone to impersonate as her so that you can send her to the palace, then I’ll find a secret place to hide her. I, Prince Xinling, vow to Heaven that regardless if the plan fails or succeeds, I will send her safely back to Zhao unharmed.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought him formidable, as this would mean he has a hostage in his hands and need not fear Xiang Shaolong not following his instructions. Even if he fails and is captured, he would not dare to reveal the mastermind. He has indeed thought of everything.



Breakfast arrived.

As Prince Xinling watched him eat, he asked with a smile, "Is Shaolong pleased with these arrangements?"

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be extremely grateful, "Very pleased, I will certainly not let you down!"

Prince Xinling looked as if he's already succeeded and laughed heartily. He saw that Xiang Shaolong has no objections to him holding Zhao Qian and thought that he trusts him implicitly, so his suspicions towards Xiang Shaolong totally disseminated.

Just as the both of them are thinking their own thoughts, a servant came to report that Ji Yanran has come to look for Xiang Shaolong.

The 2 of them were equally stunned. That Ji Yanran would come personally to a man's place to look for him, this is indeed the strangest thing that can happen in the world.

A strong look of jealousy radiated from Prince Xinling's eyes and he tried to cover it up with a dry cough and said, "Shaolong you better go and see her! For all you know she's taken a liking to you!"

However Xiang Shaolong was furrowing his brows instead. He has a lot of things to be done today and they are all important matters regarding life and death. No matter how attractive Ji Yanran is, he cannot waste time on her.

As he was thinking, he followed the servant to the hall in the outer chambers.

Ji Yanran was wearing a white fur cape, standing quietly and delicately in front of a large window looking at the beautiful scenery of the woods outside. She did not even have a maid with her.

There was no one else in the hall but all the back doors and side doors were filled with guards and maids who were squeezing there to steal a look at her. Obviously her attraction is akin to a superstar in the entertainment industry in the 21st century. Luckily there's no such thing as autographs in this era, or else her pretty hands will have to be kept busy.

Xiang Shaolong came up behind her and said quietly, "Miss Ji!"

Ji Yanran turned around prettily and smiled sweetly at him, "Can you spare some time?"

Looking at her smiling face, Xiang Shaolong does not have the heart to reject her, so he nodded, "If it's just a while, there's no problem."

When Ji Yanran heard that it's only a while, she stared at him with sadness and anger before saying quietly, "Then follow me!" And walked towards the main door.

Xiang Shaolong was feeling perplexed, where is this beauty going to take him?

The horse carriage left Prince Xinling's residence by the main door and rode

towards the east. Xiang Shaolong stole a look at her pretty side view, devoid of all cosmetics, radiating with the glow of youth. Her dainty body was fragrant, extremely captivating.

Ji Yanran suddenly said, “Absolute power will only result in absolute disintegration. This is the first time Yanran has heard such intelligent words that goes straight to the point. Mister is really brave. After you left last night, everyone, including Yanran, lost the mood to talk. Yanran has not slept the whole night, and kept on thinking about every word that Mister has said, and thinking of how confident you look when you said these words.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly lamented that he didn’t mean for things to turn out like this. There is no time to talk to her about love and relationships.

Ji Yanran’s face turned cold and she asked, “Why did Mister Xiang come with Prince Xinling to see Yanran?”

Xiang Shaolong very much wanted to say this is Prince Xinling’s arrangement and he’s got nothing to do with it. But how can he bear to hurt this great beauty so he sighed, “Does Miss Ji ask this question to all your guests who come due to your fame?”

Ji Yanran sighed quietly and said gently, “Mister Xiang is the first person that Yanran wants to ask this question to. Tell me truthfully, do I make you irritated, that’s why you’re always in such a hurry to leave and now you’re thinking of how to leave this carriage?”

She rolled her eyes at him and continued, “I’ve never seen someone as

unfathomable as you, keeping all your words inside you and only revealing some knowledge only when forced to the wall. How Yanran wish we can talk into the night, letting our words flow freely!”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved to see that she has not fallen in love with him, but just curious and would like to find out more about his ideas. Of course, if he were to launch an attack now and recite a few theories from the 21st century to make her happy, he may very well be able to get her heart. He can only lament that he has the intention but not the ability to carry this out, for he has to quickly make contact with Wu Zhuo and Pu Bu to arrange the urgent task of escaping from Daliang.

The carriage stopped.

Xiang Shaolong looked out the window in surprise. They have come to an empty space in the woods and there was no one around at all.

Ji Yanran extended her fair hands and lightly pushed his shoulder, a look of excitement in her eyes as she said, “If you don’t find Yanran too irritating, then please get off the carriage!”

Xiang Shaolong was all the more perplexed, what has finding her an irritant got to do with leaving the carriage?

Due to her urging, he went down the carriage in a daze.

Ji Yanran told the burly man who drives the carriage, “Go somewhere far away, you can only come back an hour later.”

After the man obeyed his orders, Ji Yanran removed her white fur coat, revealing the warrior's outfit underneath. For a moment Xiang Shaolong's eyes shone, looking dumbfounded at the outline of her body and her imposing air.

Ji Yanran drew the sword at her waist and said with a coy smile, "Xiang Shaolong! I am here on his Majesty's order to kill you, get ready!"

Xiang Shaolong was shocked, "Miss must be joking!"

Ji Yanran's face was icy, her eyes sharp and she humphed daintily, "Who is joking with you? Look out!"

Xiang Shaolong saw a flash of sword in front of him and dared not hesitate so he pulled his sword out as well. With a 'dang!' he blocked this beauty's forceful attack. He can feel that his opponent's attack is strong and she does not lose out to men in arm strength at all but what shocked him further is that his opponent's sword seems to have stuck to his which made it difficult for him to execute his sword moves.

Ji Yanran seems to have transformed into a female leopard, or like a ghost has possessed her as she quickly retreated, her waist seems to be made of spring as she moved about, making full use of the strength in her waist and wrist. Her sword attacks were like the River Jiang, attacking every gap available.

Xiang Shaolong was furious and executed the Mozi swordplay, defending himself. After blocking more than 10 attacks, he finally found a chance to

counterattack and his sword sliced towards the tip of his opponent's sword.

Naturally Ji Yanran's arm strength is not as good as Xiang Shaolong, and she was only relying on her excellent swordplay so that Xiang Shaolong cannot execute his moves even if he has the strength to. Now that her opponent has struck her head on, she hurriedly retreated.

Ji Yanran smiled coyly, "Finally willing to reveal your real capabilities?"

Xiang Shaolong has wasted his strength trying to fend off her initial flurry of attacks and although he can say he lost because he was caught unawares, but the main reason is that his opponent's swordplay is indeed excellent, even better than Lian Jin. At this point in time he dared not give way to her as he blocked his chest with his sword, the angle, strength used and timing made it difficult for her to attack.

Ji Yanran's eyes shone and in an instant she moved her body diagonally and her long sword pierced up from the bottom, coming in contact with Flying Rainbow.

Xiang Shaolong almost lost his grasp on his precious sword and in his shock he moved diagonally away.

Ji Yanran easily moved back into the offensive and launched another flurry of lightning fast attacks so that her opponent does not even have time to catch a breath.

Only now does Xiang Shaolong truly experience why she can be No. 2 in

swordplay in Wei. She is indeed better than him but this is only in terms of swordplay. His advantage is that every part of his body is a formidable weapon so if he wants to stay alive this time, he will have no choice but to use unorthodox moves. As he blocked off the attacks using Mozi swordplay's defensive ability, he was secretly scrutinizing his surroundings as well, looking to see if there's any way he can change defeat into victory.

The more Ji Yanran fought the stronger she became, every move full of energy, frightening yet so alluring and a delight to see.

At this time Xiang Shaolong kept retreating, he felt his back knock against a large tree.

Ji Yanran laughed as her long sword struck towards him.

Xiang Shaolong moved his sword up diagonally to block it.

'Dang!' and Xiang Shaolong's Flying Rainbow flew out of his hand.

Ji Yanran was momentarily stunned because it was obvious Xiang Shaolong loosened his grip deliberately and allowed her to strike the sword aside. Because she was using all her strength, her body fell forward from the momentum.

'Bang!' Ji Yanran's shoulder was struck by Xiang Shaolong's flying kick and she fell forward due to the intense pain, collapsing onto the soft grass.

Ji Yanran was about to turn over and use the strength in her waist to rebound

when Xiang Shaolong leapt over and pressed down on her alluring body, his 2 hands grabbing her wrists like metal manacles and she was immediately immobilized.

Xiang Shaolong grinned as he lowered his head, looking into her eyes with only a 3 inch distance between them, "You do not concede?"

Ji Yanran's body totally relaxed and she loosened her grip on her sword, her pretty face blushing and pouted prettily as she replied gently, "Why would Yanran not concede?"

Xiang Shaolong's face turned serious, "Then how are you going to account to your King?"

Their limbs intertwined, the intoxicating feeling coming so strong towards them but instead they have their opposing situation. Xiang Shaolong found it really difficult to describe such feelings.

Ji Yanran totally gave up trying to fight back as she laid on the ground limply. She blinked her huge and pretty eyes, "What account, Yanran does not understand what Mister Xiang is talking about?"

Xiang Shaolong saw the look of sincere joy in her face and slowly understood. He stood up angrily, "So you were lying to me."

Ji Yanran pouted, "Aren't you going to help me up?"

Xiang Shaolong was so furious he almost wanted to ignore her. But finally he



could not find the heart to be so cruel towards this beauty so he extended his hand and pulled her up.

Ji Yanran bowed and said, "Please don't blame Yanran? If I don't do this, how can I test your wondrous... heh, wondrous leg skill. That area is still in pain!"

Xiang Shaolong shook his head as he smiled bitterly and he walked over to pick up his flying rainbow and after returning it to its sheath, turned and walked away.

On the way back in the horse carriage, Ji Yanran looked totally ecstatic and self satisfied and kept on stealing peeks at the simmering Xiang Shaolong and said gently, "Xiang Shaolong you look so good when you're angry!"

Xiang Shaolong was fuming and he stared at her angrily, "I did not expect that talented Learned lady Ji would lie as well, and be so good at it too."

Ji Yanran rolled her pretty eyes at him and said, "Aren't you wondering why I would want to test your swordplay?"

Xiang Shaolong leaned back on the chair, crossed his leg and made a show of nonchalance as he said with a chortle, "You're trying to see if I'm suited enough to be your future husband, right?"

Ji Yanran covered her mouth in surprise, "You're only half right, because things have not reached that stage yet. Besides you only barely passed!" She guffawed and continued with a laugh, "Until today, you're the first who passed the first round. If you're really serious in wooing me, I can try my best

to give you chances.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this woman is indeed funny and he furrowed his brow, “Love is a strange and wondrous feeling between a man and a woman and comes naturally, it’s not a series of tests like what you’re doing.”

Ji Yanran’s eyes shone with an indescribable brightness as she said with a smile, “Very well said, better than anyone else, that’s why Yanran knows that you have a reason for pretending not to like me. However the way you looked at me revealed the secret in your heart. Especially when you were pressing down on me on the grass earlier, I am even more certain of your feelings towards me.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly felt guilty and was dumbfounded. He can only stare at her dumbly.

Ji Yanran asked happily, “So do you want to go back to Prince Xinling’s residence, or to Yanran’s little house by the lake?”

Xiang Shaolong seems to be startled awake and was secretly cursing himself for being bewitched by her and cried out, “Turn left quickly!”

Ji Yanran gave the orders and before they reached the main door of Prince Xinling’s residence, they turned into another street.

Xiang Shaolong said, “Please stop at the junction in front, I am getting down.”

After Ji Yanran gave the orders, she asked sadly, “Mister Xiang, do you really not feel any longing for Yanran at all?”

Xiang Shaolong felt a wave of sadness and after a sigh, he went close to her ears and whispered, “Miss is the most alluring beauty I have ever met in my life. However the timing is too inappropriate and very soon Miss will understand my difficulties. Forget me! All right?” He hardened his heart and left the carriage.

He was standing on the street when Ji Yanran lifted the curtain and called out, “Mister Xiang!”

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed and moved towards the window.

Ji Yanran looked at him deeply, intelligence reflected in her pretty eyes and she said serenely and gently, “Yanran understands now. If there’s any problem, remember that Yanran will help you at all costs.”

## Chapter 5

### Bloody battle on the long street

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Xiang Shaolong met up with Wu Zhuo at an abandoned old house. This extremely reliable battle friend who went through life and death with him said, “We’ve already followed your instructions and dug a tunnel from beneath our camp to lead to a forest behind the camp. We’ve also sent men to use that tunnel and make more than 10 wooden rafts in the forest and kept them hidden next to a small river that leads to the main canal. If we follow the flow of the water, we will be able to reach the southern border of the state of Qi in 2 days.”

Xiang Shaolong replied happily, “Lady Ya and the rest will return to camp this evening. Tell Cheng Xu to put on an act and insist on traveling only tomorrow. In that way Prince Xinling won’t be on his guard against us.”

Wu Zhuo furrowed his brows, “Then how are you going to get out of the city? Prince Xinling will certainly send men to keep an eye on you.”

Xiang Shaolong said, “I definitely cannot leave, or else no one will be able to escape. To use that tunnel to let everyone leave, we’ll need at least 2 hours. You will start immediately after the sun sets and make some fake men as cover ups. All armors, horses and heavy items will have to be left behind. Try to purchase some horses from the traders after we reach Qi and if you travel by night, you’ll definitely be able to return to Zhao safely. In summary success will depend on being secretive, just pretend that you’re horse

thieves.”

Wu Zhuo’s expression changed, “What about Grand Young Master-in-law, if I abandon you, Master will certainly take my life! At least I want to stay behind and accompany you.”

Xiang Shaolong replied sternly, “This is an order, you must follow my instructions. Without you, Cheng Xu will definitely not be able to accomplish anything.” He continued gently and consoled him. “I will definitely treasure my own life and I have a detailed plan as well. I’ll be able to save myself and take Zhao Qian away as well.”

Wu Zhuo still shook his head.

Xiang Shaolong sighed and revealed to him the whole plan.

Wu Zhuo was silent after listening to it before saying, “If Grand Young Master-in-law does not return to Zhao within 3 months, I will kill myself to replay your kindness.”

Xiang Shaolong was both touched and helpless and after discussing further some details, they parted. He managed to find Fu Bu through a series of intricate communication methods and after some secret discussion, he went back to Prince Xinling’s residence.

Prince Xinling dragged him to lunch and after the meal Xiang Shaolong returned to Flying Clouds Chamber to see Lady Ya.

Lady Ya has already received notification from Prince Xinling and has already packed. When she saw him return, she ran into his arms and cried bitterly, “Without you, Ya’er will not leave!”

Xiang Shaolong thought this to be a headache and after trying to cajole and scare her, he was finally forced to reveal his whole plan to her. Lady Ya knows that this is the only way they can survive so she had no choice but to tearfully agree.

It’s time to depart.

On Zhao Qian’s side, she and her 3 maids were hugging each other and crying bitterly, as if they are about to be parted by death, making all who witness it feel sad as well.

It was only under Xiang Shaolong’s constant urging that the 2 maids Cui Tong and Cui Lü went on their way tearfully.

Prince Xinling escorted them out of the city personally and when they reached the camp, Cheng Xu followed Xiang Shaolong’s instructions and insisted on traveling only the next day.

Xiang Shaolong pretended to be helpless and exchanged a look with Prince Xinling, finally accepting Cheng Xu’s suggestion.

Prince Xinling smiled, “Don’t worry! I’ve specially transferred a team of light cavalry to escort them on their way tomorrow morning.”

Xiang Shaolong had long noticed the Wei army camp nearby and looking at the scale knows that there is at least 2000 men there. He was laughing secretly to himself as he returned to the city with Prince Xinling.

They were riding next to each other as Prince Xinling commented, "From now on, it's best that Shaolong stays in the residence, firstly to conserve your energy and also to prevent any other accidents from happening that can spoil the grand plan. I've already sent men to send Zhao Qian to hide at a secret location so that Shaolong need not have any worries when you attend the feast tomorrow."

On hearing that Xiang Shaolong felt as if his heart has dropped into a bottomless pit. If Zhao Qian has really been kept by him, won't he be totally under the control of this fiend? But he still pretended to be grateful on the surface.

Heavens! What should he do next?

Prince Xinling asked nonchalantly, "Why did Yanran look for you this morning?"

Xiang Shaolong was thinking at this point that if Prince Xinling finds out tomorrow morning that Lady Ya and the rest have all slipped away, he will certainly suspect his sincerity, then how would he deal with him and Zhao Qian? He forced out a smile and said, "I don't know why she's looking for me too, she was talking to me about everything and left after a while."

Prince Xinling thought to himself that as long as she has not taken a liking to

him, it's all right, and he stopped talking further.

Xiang Shaolong was in an extremely bad mood and returned listlessly to Prince Xinling's residence. When he returned to his room, he got rid of the 4 pretty maids. Just as he was feeling edgy and nervous, there was a 'plonk', and a piece of cloth wrapped around a stone was thrown in.

Xiang Shaolong removed the cloth and it turned out to be a message from Liu Chao, generally informing him that Prince Xinling has increased the number of men to keep an eye on Xiang Shaolong, so he dared not come and meet with him. Zhao Qian has been brought to Lady Pingyuan's residence and was being held there and they will keep a close eye on her. At the bottom of the cloth he drew a simple map, pointing out the buildings where Lady Pingyuan resides in.

Xiang Shaolong immediately heaved a sigh of relief. As long as he knows that Zhao Qian is still within the residence, there is still hope.

At the same time he guessed that Prince Xinling is up to no good and will still get Lady Pingyuan to send Zhao Qian into the Palace instead of him, thus treating him as an idiot.

By now the sky is slowly getting dark.

Xiang Shaolong decided to relax himself and allowed the 4 pretty maids to return and help him bath and change. He went out and joined Prince Xinling for dinner, keeping up pretenses all this while.



During dinner Xiang Shaolong said, “I’d like to practice my swordplay alone tonight, it’s best that no one is sent over to serve me. Hei! Without Lady Ya, and with such alluring maids, it’ll be terrible if I cannot refrain myself!”

Prince Xinling did not suspect anything at all and agreed with a laugh. He was secretly thinking to himself, as long as I send more people to keep an eye on you, and with Zhao Qian in my hands, need I worry that you’ll fly away?

Xiang Shaolong returned to his building and immediately made a small hole in the roof and ejected his rope out, grabbing on to a large tree nearby before going into his room. He was about to carry his wooden sword when a knocking was heard on his door.

Xiang Shaolong had no choice but to hurriedly remove his equipment and walk out of the room to open the door. He saw Lady Pingyuan standing alone outside the door with a glow, looking at him deeply with very confused eyes.

He thought that something must be wrong and had no choice but to welcome her in.

Lady Pingyuan walked daintily and lightly towards his bedroom.

Xiang Shaolong was immediately scared mindless. Right now his bed is full of stuff that should not be seen so how can he allow her to go in. His mind worked quickly and he dashed forward, hugging her waist from the back.

Lady Pingyuan moaned daintily and collapsed softly into his arms, tears flowing down her cheeks.

In his entire life, Xiang Shaolong has never experienced so many women crying over him before and he felt a headache coming on seeing this. He turned her around, tilted up her pretty tear stained face and pretended to be helpless as he asked, "What's the matter!"

Lady Pingyuan closed her eyes, gritted her teeth, trying to control her sobs as she shook her head, looking utterly dejected.

No one other than Xiang Shaolong can understand her dilemma right now, wanting to harm him and send him to his death but yet can't help but come and see him. This is the reason for her torture!

Lady Pingyuan collapsed into Xiang Shaolong's arms, using all her strength to hug him, her pretty face buried in his wide chest as she continued sobbing.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting that with her around like this, how is he going to save Zhao Qian and if those assassins from Chu Mohism were to arrive, he might not be able to preserve his own life as well.

Lady Pingyuan calmed down a little and said quietly as she nibbled his ear lobe, "Shaolong! Carry me into the room!"

Xiang Shaolong almost wanted to cry for help, how can his room be 'seen'? He hurriedly said, "Lady! Wasn't it supposed to be later before we can do it?"

Lady Pingyuan stamped her feet and pouted, "I want it now! Aren't you going to carry me in?"

Xiang Shaolong carried her up by her waist.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door again.

Both of them were equally startled.

A servant's voice was heard from outside, "Lady, the Prince has something urgent and wants you to see him immediately."

Xiang Shaolong put Lady Pingyuan down and pretended to be helpless and sighed. However he knows that once Prince Xinling received news that Lady Pingyuan has come to look for him, he's worried that his sister will let her emotions overrule her and spoil the plan, that's why he sent someone here to lead her away.

Lady Pingyuan first looked furious, then her expression darkened as she replied, "Coming!"

She rushed forward and hugged Xiang Shaolong tightly, giving him a hot kiss filled with complicated feelings of joy, pain and farewell. After that she lowered her head and left, not turning back for another look.

At this point in time Xiang Shaolong doesn't know whether to hate her or love her, because that kiss earlier is really eternally unforgettable, getting right into his bones, with an inseparable mixture of love and hate.

When Xiang Shaolong arrived at the huge courtyard that Lady Pingyuan resides in, Zhao Qian's lonely heart was pining away for Xiang Shaolong. He

has become this beautiful princess's only hope.

On one hand she has almost blind confidence towards Xiang Shaolong, but she's terrified that he will not know that she's being held captive here. When the 2 extremely conflicting thoughts were torturing her mind, the 2 ladies who were assigned to guard after her every move suddenly shuddered and fainted onto the ground consecutively. And the awe inspiring and handsome Xiang Shaolong appeared proudly in her room.

Zhao Qian was ecstatic and ran into Xiang Shaolong's warm and safe embrace, her dainty body trembling violently.

Xiang Shaolong carried her to a corner that is not easily visible from the door or windows, reached out and loosened her robes.

Although Zhao Qian has always been very obliging towards Xiang Shaolong, she was still shocked and secretly furious that this person still has the mood for such things during such a dangerous time.

Just as she was about to object, Xiang Shaolong kissed her lips lovingly while continuing the removal of her robes.

Zhao Qian was feeling all soft and ticklish from his nimble fingers working on her overly sensitive skin and just as she was losing her senses, she realized Xiang Shaolong has removed the small bag on his back and is already attiring her alluring body which now only has a slip covering it, with a thick robe that can withstand the cold, covered with a black armored vest.

Xiang Shaolong squatted down and helped her change into shoes suited for long distance travel.

Zhao Qian was so moved that hot tears ran down her cheeks, her heart filled with happiness and gratitude. Even if she has to die for Xiang Shaolong now, she'll do it willingly.

Everything was done and Xiang Shaolong stood up, holding her tightly as if he's carrying the most precious treasure in the world and asked quietly, "Will my little treasure be obedient?"

Zhao Qian nodded her head vigorously.

Xiang Shaolong took out a cloth binding and tied the beautiful princess to his back, crossed her slender legs around his waist and tightened it with the cloth. The two of them merged as one, with no space between them.

Lady Ya made these cloth bindings in a hurry upon his request. Xiang Shaolong had undergone training before and is well aware of the importance of being well equipped, so he was extremely well prepared before the mission.

Zhao Qian leaned on his strong back, her previous worries all swept away and she almost moaned in satisfaction and comfort.

Xiang Shaolong went to the window and looked out. He pushed open the window lightly and listened.

A patrol troop just walked past outside the building.

When they were far away, Xiang Shaolong went out the window with Zhao Qian on his back and landed lightly on the grass outside.

When he was training in the military, he often had to carry 10kg of things and climbed hills and valleys to train his stamina so a light beauty like her will definitely not hinder his movement.

In the woods, he'll suddenly stop moving, or he'll suddenly run madly like the wind, moving swiftly and nimbly forward, his destination is of course that 2 level building which Prince Shaoyuan was staying in.

At the southeast corner gongs and drums were sounded, followed by the voices of people mixed with the barking of ferocious dogs.

Xiang Shaolong was shocked and looked towards the direction of the noises only to see fire blazing into the sky at that side. In this starless night the scene looked especially frightening.

He secretly commented that Fu Du really came at the right time and while everyone's attention were on the fire, he rapidly went towards Prince Shaoyuan's residence.

Shouts of fighting and weapons clanging were heard from the direction of the house Xiang Shaolong stayed in.

By now Xiang Shaolong has reached the flowerbeds behind Prince

Shaoyuan's residence and saw that Prince Shaoyuan, together with Liu Chao and his men were running out of the house with weapons towards the sound of the fight.

He was secretly laughing to himself, because Liu Chao had already opened the window and he climbed into the house and went into the tunnel with familiarity. After he closed the entrance, he ran down the tunnel towards the back of the mountain.

His shoes were covered with soft cloth so even if he was running rapidly, no sound was emitted so he need not fear Prince Xinling will hear him. Besides, by now there's no way Prince Xinling will remain on his bed.

After running a distance, the tunnel made a 90 degrees turn towards the south and in a short while, he was at the exit on the other end of the tunnel.

He took out his lock picking tools and unlocked the metal door. After closing it properly again, he followed the stone steps outside the door and reached the last door that leads to the ground level outside.

Outside is a dense forest, situated outside the southern wall of Prince Xinling's residence.

After Xiang Shaolong sealed the tunnel properly, he checked out the directions and ran towards the nearest city wall of Daliang. As long as he can leave this city, chances of them escaping will be very much greater.

No one was on the dark streets, it's like a ghost city but hatefully, every

household has a lantern hung outside their doors. Although the light was dim and the wind was blowing on the lanterns making them rock, but it makes hiding for him all the more difficult.

Xiang Shaolong tried his best to avoid the larger streets, sticking to the darker alleys.

Sounds of hooves were heard and Xiang Shaolong had just passed a main street but before he can dodge into an alley, the enemy noticed him and rode over shouting.

Xiang Shaolong was extremely perplexed, he cannot figure out how did Prince Xinling manage to find men so quickly to come after him?

But there's no use thinking about it now, he can only run for his life.

Zhao Qian who was lying down on his back was lightly trembling, obviously she's very nervous which made him love and pity her more. Such an elegant beauty, to think she has to go through such difficulties!

After he ran out of the alley and had just turned into a main street, he heard hoof beats coming rapidly from the left, 10 odd riders were coming after them like the wind.

Xiang Shaolong knows that there's no way he can avoid them so he made up his mind and moved to a side, with his back against the houses and his front facing the enemies.



The riders all dismounted and one of them chortled, “Xiang Shaolong, let’s see where you can escape to today?”

It turns out to be the one who treats animals as his teacher, Xiao Weimou and of course his left and right hand men Ning Chong and Zheng Lei were with him.

Xiang Shaolong quietly counted, there’s altogether 19 of them and all of them looked strong and stout. Luckily the other party obviously came out in a hurry and did not have with them long distance weapons like bows and arrows, or else they could have killed them easily.

The 19 of them spread out and surrounded him in a crescent moon formation so that there’s no way he can escape.

Xiao Weimou laughed icily, “I’ve expected you to try to escape at the last moment, so I’ve been keeping an eye on you day and night. Ha! That should be the beautiful princess you have on your back! Tonight I can guarantee that she will die in ecstasy.”

His men on hearing his words started laughing lewdly.

Xiao Weimou added another sentence, “After I’ve had my fun, all of you will have a share!”

These ferocious men whooped, obviously they have already regarded Zhao Qian as a sure catch.

Xiang Shaolong followed the things he learnt in the past during military training and breathed deep and long to maintain his calm and at the same time loosened the cloth that bind Zhao Qian to him. He instructed, “Qian’er! This is a life and death situation, you must be brave and no matter what you have to hide behind me.”

Zhao Qian was so frightened that she was losing her senses but after hearing Xiang Shaolong’s calm and confident voice, her courage increased and she stood firmly on the ground. However, the blood was not flowing properly to her limbs yet and she felt them go soft so she hurriedly pressed onto his shoulders and leaned on his back.

Xiao Weimou saw that this is a chance not to be missed so he waved his heavy sword and shouted, “Attack!”

Xiang Shaolong withdrew his wooden sword and stood his stance without a word, his eagle sharp eyes keeping track on the enemies who are coming towards him from the left, right and front.

Xiao Weimou led the rest and followed behind, tightening the encirclement towards Xiang Shaolong.

The people in the houses on both sides who were rudely awoken stuck their heads out the windows for a proper look but with swears coming from Xiao Weimou’s men, they were so frightened they retracted, afraid to see what’s happening.

Right at this time 3 long swords attacked towards Xiang Shaolong

simultaneously.

Once Xiang Shaolong saw his opponent's swordplay, he knows that he's facing formidable opponents. Since his men are already so good, naturally Xiao Weimou would be even better.

But now there's no time to think further, the hand which has a flying needle hidden flew out and struck right at the face of the enemy to his left. The wooden sword in his right hand blocked off the long sword attacking him from the middle and he used the opportunity where his opponent's sword was reflected up to execute a side kick and kicked hard on his opponent's groin, after which he fended off the attacker on the right with a sweep of his sword.

The one who got struck by the needle fell facing up, and died on the spot.

The one who got struck by the leg fell backwards, unable to get up.

Xiao Weimou did not expect him to be so formidable and was immediately furious as he shouted, "Attack!" He raised his sword and attacked first, not giving him a chance to take out another flying needle.

Xiang Shaolong's left hand drew out Flying Rainbow from his waist. For a warrior like him who has undergone rigorous training, both his left and right hands are equally nimble and strong, not like the average person who favors only the use of one hand.

Xiang Shaolong cried out, "Qian'er follow me!" and he moved diagonally to

avoid Xiao Weimou.

Zhao Qian followed behind him.

The murderous air from the flash of the swords came from 3 directions.

Xiang Shaolong knows that this is a matter of life and death and he cannot retreat. He felt valor rising up in him and vowed to protect the beauty behind him with his life. His right hand holding the wooden sword and left hand holding Flying Rainbow, he attacked fiercely, his magnificent and forceful aura is even stronger than the enemy's.

The sound of metal and wood clanging against each other was heard and blood was seen at the same time on Xiang Shaolong and his opponent. His chest was struck by the enemy's sword but luckily he has his armor and although his enemy's sword was sharp, it could only pierce through the armor a little and cause an injury about half an inch deep.

The other sword slashed towards his waist but it struck the belt that held his steel needles so he was not injured.

Such close combat is extremely dangerous, a case of either you perish or I die. Especially when Xiang Shaolong has to protect Zhao Qian behind him, he cannot try to avoid his enemy's sword so he was injured once they fought. It only leaves to be seen who will be the last to fall before a victor can be ascertained.

Amongst the 5 who attacked, one has his throat cut by Flying Rainbow and

died on the spot. His wooden sword struck another's arm and the long sword immediately fell to the ground as he hurriedly retreated while the other 3 were forced back by his attack.

The sound of weapons slicing through the air could be heard from his left and right and Xiang Shaolong swept his sword towards the right only to see Xiao Weimou dashing towards him from the right, waving his sword towards his head.

At the same time Zhao Qian screamed, another enemy was coming from the left near the wall, his target is obviously Zhao Qian.

Zheng Lei and Ning Chong whose swordsmanship were only below Xiao Weimou came attacking from the front one behind another with the aim to kill Xiang Shaolong with one blow.

These people are very experienced in fighting and once they strike they will not allow Xiang Shaolong any chance of escape.

The sword attack from Xiao Weimou who is aiming directly at him may look simple but it encompasses changes and at any time he can change it into a slash. Just that attack alone is enough to keep Xiang Shaolong busy, to the point that he dare not become distracted.

As for the other attacks he can only rely on his hearing to decide on the course of action.

Xiang Shaolong's used all his strength in his left hand which was holding on to

Flying Rainbow to heavily block against Zheng Lei's oncoming sword attack and the impact forced his opponent to retreat 3 steps back. He swept his left hand and Flying Rainbow flew out of his hand, transformed into a flash of light as it flew straight towards the chest of the man who was going towards Zhao Qian.

At the same time the wooden sword went up diagonally, blocking Xiao Weimou's deadly blow before going into Mozi swordplay's mysterious defensive mode but the wooden sword looks as if it's on the offensive rather than defensive such that even with Xiao Weimou's ferocity, he was stunned as well and retreated for the moment.

Right at this moment Ning Chong's sword came straight at his throat from the front.

There is not enough time for Xiang Shaolong to block with his wooden sword and in that instance he suddenly had an idea and jumped up.

'Clang!', the sword which was aimed at his neck now hit the belt around his waist which was filled with the steel needles.

Just as Ning Chong was feeling surprised, Xiang Shaolong's wooden sword slashed vertically and hit him right on his head.

Sounds of bone cracking were immediately heard and Ning Chong fell to the side, knocking into 2 men who were advancing and all 3 of them fell to the ground.

Right at this time another enemy took the opportunity to stab towards his chest just as he was landing. A sharp pain resonated through his body and as Zhao Qian screamed, Xiang Shaolong gave a flying kick towards the front of his opponent. That person is still midway through his attack and with the kick he was sent tumbling backwards and knocked into another enemy who was coming up for an attack.

The sword was pulled sharply out from Xiang Shaolong's left armpit and fresh blood spurted out.

Since the beginning of the fight, although Xiang Shaolong suffered one light and one serious injury, he managed to kill 4 of his enemies and severely injure 3, with the expert fighter Ning Chong amongst the dead.

Everyone was in a blood fury and the remaining 12 attacked madly.

Xiao Weimou is all the more mad and came from the right again, with his sword slashing down.

Xiang Shaolong knows that after his injury, he's definitely not Xiao Weimou's match and cried out, "Qian'er follow me!" and shifted to his left while staying close to the wall and blocking off the enemy's ferocious attacks with the wooden sword in his hand.

Xiao Weimou was blocked by his own men from attacking and in his anger, he pulled his own men away and dashed in to attack.

Zhao Qian who was hiding behind Xiang Shaolong saw reflections from the

swords and sabres surrounding them and fresh blood kept flowing from her beloved's body, only managed to follow him for 10 odd steps before her legs turned soft and she fell to the ground in a sitting position.

By now Xiang Shaolong has been injured numerous times by the swords and when he felt Zhao Qian falling down behind him, he thought to himself that it's the end. He geared up all his ferocity and without a care to himself, gathered his strength and made a sweeping strike, knocking the advancing enemies and also blocking one of Xiao Weimou's heavy slash.

Xiao Weimou did not use all his strength in this attack but because his arm strength has always been better than Xiang Shaolong, and also the latter is now tired out from the fierce fight, he immediately lost his hold on the wooden sword and it fell to the ground.

The 10 over wounds all over Xiang Shaolong's body was pouring blood and in that dangerous moment he gave a flying kick which landed right on Xiao Weimou's belly, making this ferocious man retreat quickly but it was obviously not enough to injure him.

2 swords came attacking.

Xiang Shaolong quickly pulled out 2 flying needles and with a flick of his hands, the needle on his right hand struck an enemy's chest while the needle on his left hand, because of the serious injury sustained to his arm, missed his target and only struck the enemy's shoulder and that person ignored the needle injury and continued his advance.



Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this must surely be the end and he pulled his dagger out and was about to kill Zhao Qian first to spare her the torture of being raped when the sound of a bow was heard and an arrow flew over like lightning, piercing that person's neck, flinging him away with the impact as he died on the spot.

Both him and his enemies turned to look at the direction where the arrow came from and saw a strange person wearing an eerie mask, dressed in a long black robe and riding over speedily on a horse. That person threw away the bow and pulled out a long spear, dashing right into the battle.

The enemy quickly returned to the fight in shock.

That person's skills with the spear is extraordinary and also he's has just freshly joined the fight, all who opposed him were injured or killed, causing chaos to the enemy. In an instant he came next to Xiang Shaolong and extended the circle of the spear attack, forcing Xiao Weimou and the rest back. He called out quietly, "Aren't you getting up the horse!"

Xiang Shaolong could recognize it was Ji Yanran's voice and happily helped Zhao Qian up the horse, picked up his wooden sword before using the last of his strength to jump up behind Zhao Qian.

Ji Yanran immediately controlled the horse with her legs, the spear in her hands danced around as it once again forced Xiao Weimou back and fought her way out of the encirclement, escaping with the 2 of them.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Tending to injuries at the Observatory**

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Xiang Shaolong had countless nightmares.

He dreamt that the time machine sent him back to the 21st century where he was charged with the major crime of messing up history. Suddenly Shu'er and Su'er came to look for him with blood flowing from the orifices on their faces, blaming him for not avenging their deaths. And then countless different faces appeared before him.

These include his parents, relatives, friends, Mei Canniang, Wu Tingfang, the King of Zhao, Zhao Mu etc, and cries kept ringing in his ears together with the wails of souls and ghosts!

In his haze he seems to know that he is pacing at death's door.

No! I must continue living.

For others and for myself!

I cannot give up.

His body alternated between hot and cold, his soul seems to have left his body, as if there's unbearable pain, but it feels totally numb as well.

He does not know how long he struggled at death's door before he finally regained consciousness.

For a moment, he seems to have returned to the safe military hostel in the 21st century.

Cheers erupted next to his bed, Zhao Qian fell on the side of the bed, tears streaming down her face as she laughed and cried.

Before Xiang Shaolong can take a close look at Zhao Qian, he felt darkness surrounding him again and he fainted.

When he regained consciousness again, his mind and body seems to be much better.

Zhao Qian is so happy that she can only cry bitterly.

Xiang Shaolong wiped her tears with his hand weakly and asked feebly, "What is this place, how long was I unconscious."

A familiar voice rang out from the door, "This is the highest level of my Heaven Viewing Pagoda, on the 5th level. Shaolong you were unconscious for 9 days, if it was someone else who was that seriously injured and lost that much blood, that person would have died long ago. But you're not the average person, so you definitely won't die. Obviously everything is planned by Heavens!"

Xiang Shaolong was momentarily stunned and saw a person walking towards

the bed, and it turned out to be Zou Yan.

He never really liked this person and he cannot imagine why he would risk his own life to save him and asked in astonishment, “Why did Mister save me?”

Zhao Qian who was sitting by his bed replied, “You are really indebted to Mister Zou for saving your life. If not for his excellent healing skills and meticulous care...”

Zou Yan chortled and interrupted Zhao Qian’s words and said as he lowered his head to take a closer look at Xiang Shaolong, “The person who really saved you is Ji Yanran. I just happened to be around! This Heaven Viewing Pagoda is a place I use to study astrology, and also the tallest building in Daliang, I guarantee that no one will search their way here. Besides I am in no way related to you, so no one will suspect me.”

Xiang Shaolong’s mood turned for the better and he slowly regained the strength to speak. He puzzled, “Mister still have not replied my earlier question.”

Zou Yan smiled a little, “I’ll have to start from the beginning. 3 years ago, I found a new star in the state of Qi, moving towards Tian Chang, the area where the Zhao and Wei borders meet and I know that the new leader of this era has finally appeared. Therefore I came to Daliang to look for a new master.”

Xiang Shaolong was totally befuddled, “What is Tian Chang? Is there a state of Zhao and state of Wei there as well?”

Zou Yan said proudly, “Heavens and humans are related, everything that happens on earth happens because of Heaven’s decree. My study of the 5 elements is based on the 5 stars in Heaven, wood, fire, earth, metal and water, and I deduce what will happen on earth based on Heaven’s decree. Tian Chang is how I separate the Heavens into different areas according to the layout of the states on earth. For example if a guest star happens to take over the main star of a certain area, then the ruler of that area will be in trouble.”

Xiang Shaolong is in no mood now to listen to such superstitious and outrageous theory so he asked, “So what has that got to do with me?”

Zou Yan looked at Zhao Qian, who was looking at him with her large pretty eyes, filled with idolization and he is all the more thrilled and started theorizing, “How can it not have anything to do with you? At the same time you arrived at Daliang, that new star happens to fly into the position of Daliang in Tian Chang, therefore I knew that the new saint has arrived. The first time I saw you, although I felt you have the aura of a dragon, I did not yet think of it until that night when you talked about the earth shattering theory about governing a country did I guess that you are the new saint. That night when you were attacked, I was convinced that I was right about you.”

After he spoke, he knelt down and kow-towed 3 times respectfully.

Xiang Shaolong was amused and quickly asked him to stand, saying “I can understand the front part, but why is it that you are even more convinced of your faith when I was attacked and injured?”

Zou Yan explained, “On that afternoon that you were attacked, Miss Ji returned moodily to the little house by the lake and after my prolonged questions did she reveal that you refused to woo her. Therefore I told her: the new star in heaven is being forced aside by another star, and I’m afraid you will meet with danger that night. That’s why Miss Ji was able to save you in time and send you here. Tell me, Shaolong, if you’re not the new saint, how can things be such a coincidence?”

Xiang Shaolong was dumbfounded.

A wave of fatigue swept over him and after he forced the medicine down, he fell into a deep sleep again.

When Xiang Shaolong woke up, he felt a lot better than the last time and was able to sit up and eat. Scars have begun to form over his 10 odd wounds, leaving only the wound under his armpit still in very much pain, but the other wounds were not affecting him.

Zou Yan has gone out, and there was only Zhao Qian in the highest level of this ancient observatory.

This pretty princess happily fed him the porridge cooked with precious and expensive herbs.

Xiang Shaolong looked at her sympathetically, “Qian’er! You’ve lost weight.”

Zhao Qian replied gently, “Compared to the sacrifice you made for me, this is nothing. That night I saw how you were afraid that I would be injured and

thus used your own body to block the sword blows from the thieves, my heart was utterly broken.” She continued worriedly, “Sister Yanran has not been here for 3 days, this is really worrying.”

Xiang Shaolong felt an injection of energy, “Does she visit me often?”

Zhao Qian nodded her head, “She was so concerned about you, and comes every time to help me clean and dress your wounds.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Doesn’t that mean that the both of you have seen every part of my body?”

Zhao Qian blushed and nodded her head, but her pretty eyes revealed her joy and her expression looked absolutely alluring.

Xiang Shaolong felt lust arising and said gently as he grabbed her hand, “I must have revenge and see our Princess’s whole body.”

Zhao Qian gently pulled her dainty hands away and continued feeding him the porridge, saying with a blush, “See if you want to!”

A rush of love and sweetness welled up in Xiang Shaolong. To think that the beauty will allow this, how can he not feel grateful. He said with a smile, “Not only will I see, but I want to investigate with my hands as well, will Princess object?”

Zhao Qian blushed to her ears and stared at him, not daring to answer him but her expression shows her utter willingness.

Xiang Shaolong sighed happily.

Footsteps were heard from the stairs.

Both of them started getting nervous.

Ji Yanran's sweet voice rung out, "No need to be afraid! It's Yanran."

Zhao Qian was overjoyed and went to welcome her.

In a short while the 2 ladies appeared shoulder to shoulder in front of Xiang Shaolong.

Ji Yanran lost weight as well but when she saw him her bright eyes shone immediately and her gaze intertwined with his.

Xiang Shaolong said, "Xiang Shaolong will never forget how Miss saved me."

Ji Yanran sat on his bed without any embarrassment and first looked at his wounds before saying with a relieved sigh, "No need for such polite words. The rate of your recovery is astonishing. You don't know how frightening you looked the other night with fresh blood all over your body, and you almost made me cry because of you." She continued with a blush on her pretty face, "And it's the first time Yanran cried over a man!"

Zhao Qian laughed, "You don't know how good Sister Yanran was towards you!"



Xiang Shaolong felt a boldness overcome him and daringly grabbed Ji Yanran's delicate hands and said gently, "It seems that not only have I passed, but I have taken a step further into your heart, right?"

Ji Yanran stared at him and said nonchalantly, "Sorry. You're still at the passing stage." Although she said that, she did not try to retract her hands at all.

Xiang Shaolong was filled with love as he replied with a smile, "I have a chance as long as I've passed, didn't Miss Ji said that you will try your best to make it easier for me?"

Zhao Qian listened to their interesting exchange and can't help but steal a laugh at the side.

After Ji Yanran stared at Zhao Qian, she told Xiang Shaolong, "I came all the way here with so much difficult and am even sitting next to you, isn't it making it easier for you already?"

Xiang Shaolong was awakened by her words and returned to the cold and cruel reality, asking, "How is the situation outside?"

Ji Yanran said calmly, "Prince Xinling, Lord Longyang and Xiao Weimou are all trying their best to look for you and the defenses in the city has been increased numerous times. Even the areas outside the city and the river routes are filled with guards. I'm afraid you'll have to turn into a bird before you can fly out."

Xiang Shaolong asked with fear and concern, “What about the others?”

Zhao Qian sat closely next to Ji Yanran and said, “Don’t worry! Qian’er asked Sister Yanran long ago, they’ve all escaped safely, not a single person was captured.”

Xiang Shaolong was relieved but once he thought about Prince Xinling, he can’t laugh. He’s lost the ‘Lu Gong’s Secret Manual’, so how can he possibly let him off?

Ji Yanran’s expression turned serious as she said, “These few days the Weis have been going door to door searching your whereabouts, and they will ultimately find their way here. For the moment they’re only keeping an eye on me and have not suspected Mister Zou yet. But as long as you remain in Daliang, you’re still in extreme danger.”

Zhao Qian said quietly, “Sister you’re so capable, you’ll surely have a way.”

Ji Yanran replied, “I’ve been constantly thinking of a plan, but security is so tight.” She remembered something and told Xiang Shaolong, “Those equipment you have on your waist were all very strange, even a knowledgeable man like Mister Zou has never seen it before, where did you get it from?”

Xiang Shaolong knows she’s referring to the hooks and clasps used for climbing and replied, “It’s my own design, made by the craftsmen of Zhao. As long as we can reach the city walls, I will have a way to climb over the walls with Qian’er.”

Ji Yanran was very surprised and after scrutinizing him for a moment, sighed lightly, “The more I am in contact with you, the more I realize how unfathomable you are. But with the current situation, it’s impossible for you to reach the city walls without being detected by those at the watchtowers. Even if you can leave the city, you cannot avoid the thousands of soldiers outside the city, so we still need to think of another way.”

Zhao Qian went close to her ear and whispered, “Is Sister starting to like him more and more?”

Ji Yanran’s pretty face blushed. Sounds of bells ringing was suddenly heard in the room.

Before Xiang Shaolong can figure out what is happening, the expressions on the 2 ladies changed, “Enemies are approaching!”

Ji Yanran helped Xiang Shaolong up while Zhao Qian hurriedly gathered all the blankets that has traces of blood and everything else that is associated with Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong asked in shock, “Where can we hide?”

Ji Yanran helped him to a huge wardrobe and opened the door, only to see it filled with clothes inside with no space to hide a person at all. She then extended her hand and pushed, the clothes rose up miraculously and revealed a secret compartment inside.

By now Zhao Qian has packed everything and even let the bed curtains loose

before hurrying over to help Xiang Shaolong hide in the secret compartment. Ji Yanran pulled down the outer compartment holding the clothes and the wardrobe door closed automatically, how intricately done.

That space that was meant for hiding 1 person now has 3 people squeezed inside, so one can imagine how cramped it is. The 3 of them stuck to each other front to back, with Zhao Qian's alluring body pressing tightly against his back while Ji Yanran was squeezed face to face with him.

He can clearly feel the marvelous curves of Ji Yanran's body, especially when he's only wearing a pair of shorts, and the exciting fragrance almost made him forget about the danger they're now in.

Ji Yanran is a little taller than Zhao Qian, her pretty face happened to lean on his shoulder and she quietly whispered in his ear, "This is a place Mister Zou designed to save his own life, I did not expect we'd get to use it instead."

Although the place is cramped, it's not stuffy at all. Obviously it has marvelously designed ventilation.

Xiang Shaolong suddenly had a thought; no matter how respected people in this era is, but they all have a fear of not living past another day. That's why Zou Yan has this secret compartment for hiding while Prince Xinling has his secret tunnel for escape.

Suddenly there were strange noises in the secret compartment.

Xiang Shaolong concentrated and realized it's the rapid breathing of the 2

ladies. With the heaving of their bosoms, he can feel even more strongly the rubbing of their bodies against him. Luckily Xiang Shaolong's body is still feeling weak so he did not have any natural male reaction, or else the situation would be even more embarrassing.

The 2 ladies' bodies were becoming softer and weaker and Xiang Shaolong felt his lust arising and can't help but reach one arm forward and the other backward and hug them tightly.

Ji Yanran is a little better but Zhao Qian moaned and her slender arms encircled him from the back and hugged his waist tightly, her whole body heated up.

Footsteps were heard, obviously someone was searching the place level by level until at least they reached this highest level.

Prince Xinling's voice can be heard outside, "This is the first time I've seen Mister Zou's observatory. Hey! What gadget is this?"

Zou Yan replied calmly, "This is an equipment used to measure the position of the stars in the sky, I am about to start making an exquisite and accurate map of the stars."

Prince Xinling is obviously not interested in the tour and he commented as he pushed the door open, "Hai! I thought there'll be something interesting in this room, it turns out only to be your bedroom."

Zou Yan laughed, "My work can only be done at night, how can I not have a

place to sleep.”

Prince Xinling said, “Why don’t I go to your star observatory first to explore!”

Footsteps traveled up towards the balcony at the top.

The 3 of them just heaved a sigh of relief.

There were footsteps coming in again and that person searched thoroughly, even pulling the wardrobe door open, not leaving anything unchecked at all.

Their hearts were almost at their throats and were secretly cursing Prince Xinling for being cunning to lure Zou Yan away so that his men can do a thorough search.

After some disturbances, Prince Xinling and Zouyan came down.

The 3 of them were a little relieved and once again felt the excitement of their bodies and limbs intertwined together.

Zhao Qian and Ji Yanran are both unmarried ladies and although they are very much interested in Xiang Shaolong, they still felt utterly embarrassed.

Zhao Qian is a little better as she’s used to being intimate with Xiang Shaolong; Ji Yanran has never had the experience of being squeezed in a man’s arm and her heart kept beating madly. In this quiet place how can this sound escape Xiang Shaolong’s ears and just based on this point is enough to thorough make her feel ashamed.

Whether deliberately or not, the 3 of them almost felt as if they have no wish to leave this safe space.

Xiang Shaolong's lips leaned towards Ji Yanran's ears as he said quietly, "Hey!"

Ji Yanran raised her pretty face in a daze and in the darkness she can feel Xiang Shaolong's breath on her face. She felt utterly lost and forgot to speak.

Xiang Shaolong had wanted to ask her if they can go out now, but he suddenly felt her lips so close to his and thought to himself that what a better time to take advantage of her than this. So he kissed heavily on her soft and wet lips.

Ji Yanran's dainty body trembled and she finally followed Zhao Qian's example and extended her arms to hug him tightly while tilting her pretty face up, allowing this man to continue with his ungentlemanly bullying.

Footsteps were heard again.

Although she obviously knows that those on the outside cannot see what is inside, Ji Yanran still removed her lips away from Xiang Shaolong's enticing mouth in fear.

Zou Yan's low voice was heard from outside the wardrobe, "You can come out?"

Xiang Shaolong felt that something was not right. With Prince Xinling's status,

there's no reason that Zou Yan will not send him off personally and if that is the case, he will not be back so soon.

Besides if everyone else is gone, with Zou Yan's candid character, there's no reason for him to lower his voice so much that he sounded a little hoarse.

Zhao Qian at this time is totally intoxicated under Xiang Shaolong's strong manly embrace and will not be bothered with what is happening outside at all.

Although Ji Yanran's senses is a little lost, but in her cloudy mind she seems to believe that it is Zou Yan who is calling from the outside and was about to reply when Xiang Shaolong's lips sealed over hers again.

Ji Yanran secretly grumbled, thinking why is this person so lecherous that he's even ignoring Zou Yan's calls.

That person called out again twice.

Ji yanran slowly regained her senses and knew that something is not right and at the same time realized that Xiang Shaolong is not that lecherous after all.

The person outside cursed quietly, "Prince is really doing extra work. There's obviously no one but he still wants me to go to every level and pretend to be Zou Yan can call out 3 times, hei!"

That person left after cursing.



The 3 of them all felt cold sweat down their bodies. Prince Xinling is really careful, and obviously he has many capable men under him. This person sounded really authentic in impersonating Zou Yan's voice, just that his voice is a little lower and hoarse.

Ji Yanran has always prided herself on her intelligence and although her senses were dulled by Xiang Shaolong's kisses, she still feel ashamed. At the same time she's totally in awe of Xiang Shaolong's intelligence and felt a love for him welling up from deep within her heart. She proactively kissed Xiang Shaolong back fiercely.

Xiang Shaolong's hands explored the 2 women's back and buttocks greedily and for a moment lust filled the secret compartment. The earlier danger served only to fuel and excite their passion.

Just as it was about to get almost out of hand, footsteps were heard again, followed by the opening of the wardrobe door and the lifting of the front panel. The 2 ladies were so embarrassed that they buried their heads in Xiang Shaolong's neck.

Xiang Shaolong looked at Zou Yan with embarrassment as he said with a bitter smile, "It seems that I'm not some new saint at all, because I do not have the resistance of a saint at all."

Zou Yan was almost at a loss for words as he chuckled, "I think your recovery is even faster than what I imagined a saint would take."

## **Chapter 7**

### **Escape from Daliang**

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5 days later, Xiang Shaolong was able to get off the bed and walk. Besides the wound under his armpit, which still gave him some pain, he has regained all his strength.

The relationship between him and Zhao Qian has grown to a point that they cannot bear to be apart from each other. Although they are in hiding in the room all day long, they don't find the confinement difficult at all.

Ever since that day, Ji Yanran had not returned and according to Zou Yan, Prince Xinling has always been suspecting her so he's keeping a very close eye on her.

Xiang Shaolong believes that Daliang's security will ultimately loosen up, because that is human nature, there's no way they can carry on with this forever. Besides, even after such a thorough search revealed nothing about their whereabouts, anyone would have thought that they have escaped.

That night just as they were embroiled intimately, Ji Yanran arrived and upon seeing the blushing Zhao Qian, her own face reddened as well, which made her look even more alluring and beautiful.

Xiang Shaolong's body was all heated up but he dare not get into the real act with Zhao Qian and on seeing this lady whose beauty is more than Zhao Qian

arriving, he was secretly overjoyed. Just as he was about to start flirting with her, Zou Yan came up.

Xiang Shaolong had no choice but to let go of Ji Yanran whom he was half forcing into a hug and let her sit on the rug.

Ji Yanran stared at him daintily for a moment, blaming him for behaving more and more rudely with her before she said, “10 days ago I sent some people out of the city and ordered them to dress up as both of you, even carrying a fake wooden sword with the purpose of letting others discover them. Now the plan is indeed working. Yesterday Prince Xinling personally led the troops and went towards the border of Chu in pursuit. The security at the gates of Daliang is more relaxed now, so it’s time for you to leave.”

Xiang Shaolong and Zou Yan both cheered, they did not expect Ji Yanran to have such a splendid plan. What is even more rare is that she only talked about it after the plan is a success, which shows how much self control she has.

Ji Yanran looked at Xiang Shaolong with sadness and unhappiness, her pretty face revealing how she cannot bear to part with him.

Xiang Shaolong was stunned and he asked, “You’re not leaving with us?”

Ji Yanran shook her head, “I really wish to, but if I leave, everyone will know that I am connected with you and I will put many others in jeopardy, maybe even Mister Zou included. That day Prince Xinling came to search this observatory precisely because Yanran kept finding excuses to come here and

look at the stars, and that aroused his suspicions.”

Xiang Shaolong knows this to be the truth so he sighed and asked, “Then when can we meet again?”

Ji Yanran smiled prettily, “Don’t worry! Yanran’s greatest wish in life is to be able to assist the new saint in unifying the world so that the people need not have to suffer wars any more, so I will not let you off from now on.”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head with a bitter smile, “I don’t believe that I’m really the new saint. Even if I can return to Zhao, the way will be fraught with dangers. If you want to find the true new saint, you’d better be more patient in your search in case you find the wrong person and regret it in future.” His words were filled with jealousy, naturally because the reason Ji Yanran fell for him is all because he is that new saint.

A strange look flashed past Ji Yanran’s face and she lowered her head, not speaking.

Zou Yan said seriously, “What you’ve said further affirmed that you’re the new saint, because the especially bright star that represents you is now being chased by other stars. According to the heavens, you’ll need at least 20 years before you can unify the world and before that you’ll naturally face countless dangers.”

Xiang Shaolong’s body trembled as he heard all this and looked at Zou Yan dumbfounded and for the first time he dare not belittle this ancient astrologer because it is indeed about 20 years later that Emperor Qin unified

the warring states and became the first emperor in history.

Ji Yanran suddenly said, “Mister Zou, Princess Qian, Yanran would like to ask you to wait outside the hall for a while. There’s something I have to speak with Xiang Shaolong about.”

Zou Yan and Zhao Qian understood her meaning so they went out the room and even closed the door.

Ji Yanran’s head was still lowered as she said quietly, “Xiang Shaolong, I want you to know clearly that Ji Yanran likes you as a person, and it has got nothing to do with whether you’re going to be the new saint or not.”

Xiang Shaolong knows that his words earlier have hurt her and was feeling extremely apologetic so he reached out to hug her.

Ji Yanran exclaimed angrily, “Don’t touch me!”

Xiang Shaolong is an expert in the field of love and knows that she finds it a loss of face if she accedes so he ignored her warning and jumped over, pressing her down on the rug and kissed her hard on her lips.

Ji Yanran gave a token struggle before her stronger reaction took over and she can’t help but want to join with him immediately.

After their lips parted, Ji Yanran said sadly, “Tomorrow morning, Mister Han Fei will escort the grains he borrowed back to Han. Yanran has made arrangements with him, one of the carriages carrying the grains will have a

secret compartment in it and it will certainly be able to bring you out of Daliang safely. Xiang Lang! Alive, Yanran will belong to your Xiang family and no matter what I will look for you. Don't forget about me!"

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Qian hugged each other as they lay in the secret compartment under the carriage and left Daliang without much trouble towards the canal. When they reach that place they will change into traveling by boat and follow the river up west to the Han border.

Late snow was falling outside and the carriages moved slowly. With thick blankets lining the bottom of the secret compartment, the 2 of them don't feel too uncomfortable at all. In fact they felt as if this is a warm and sweet little heaven.

The 2 of them behaved intimately for a while before they suppressed their desire so that they will not lose self-control and engage in the real act.

Zhao Qian looked at the top of the secret compartment and said sincerely, "I've never seen a girl more beautiful and intelligent than Sister Yanran. Just a little trick from her and she can escort us out of Daliang comfortably."

Xiang Shaolong looked at her beautiful profile but his mind was on another matter as he asked with a smile, "Would you mind not being a Princess!"

Zhao Qian turned around, leaned her face in her hands, her pretty eyes shining as she looked at him with love and said, "Qian'er will only mind one thing, and that is not becoming Xiang Shaolong's woman. I don't care about anything else."

Xiang Shaolong kissed her lips lovingly and said with a low sigh, "That will make things easier. I'll find a way to hide you, then report that you've been killed by Xiao Weimou so you need not return to the palace and become a pitiful princess."

Zhao Qian was ecstatic, "Will you really do that for Qian'er? You're not afraid Imperial Father will punish you?"

Xiang Shaolong boasted, "I am the new saint, how can I possibly be so easily dealt with." He continued with a chuckle, "Actually I'm doing this for myself, it's been to torturous suppressing myself."

Zhao Qian blushed brightly as she buried her head in his arms, saying quietly with a mixture of shyness and happiness, "Whenever Xiang Lang wants Qian'er, I'll give myself to you."

Xiang Shaolong was touched and hugged her tightly.

Zhao Qian said gently, "Didn't Qian'er ask Xiang Lang to kill Zhao Mu for me as revenge? I've now changed my mind, and only hope I can flee far away with Xiang Lang. I don't care about anything else."

Xiang Shaolong secretly sighed, what about avenging Shu'er? Zhao Mu and him, there can only be one.

The carriage stopped, it has reached the pier at the canal.

3 ships from the state of Han with twin masts returned to Han with the

10,000 stone of grains.

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Qian, with Han Fei's cover, came out and hid inside a small cabin.

Although all the soldiers on the ship are Han, Han Fei is still cautious in case news gets leaked out.

The 2 of them were happily ensconced with each other especially now that they have unlocked the restriction of not being to join as one and both knows what will soon happen. Nothing much needs to be said about the flirtatious Xiang Shaolong, but even the usually gentle princess is starting to become bolder.

Han Fei sent his trusted aide to send them their dinner and the both of them sat shoulder to shoulder on the rug, enjoying the meal.

Xiang Shaolong wanted to drink some wine but Zhao Qian forcefully took his wine cup away and said coquettishly, "No! Zhao Qian will not allow you to drink, I want to yo be fully aware of what you're doing."

Xiang Shaolong looked at her pretty face and said while shaking and bobbing his head, "Even if wine will not intoxicate, the person will still feel intoxicated. Later when I see Princess's beautiful body lying on the bed, I will definitely be thoroughly intoxicated, how can I still stay sober!"

Zhao Qian fed him a piece of meat as she exclaimed happily, "So well said, and making me so happy on hearing it. I'll reward you with a piece of meat."



Xiang Shaolong took the piece of meat in his mouth and leapt over hugging her and extending his hands to loosen her clothing, saying with a smile, “Let me take a look at Princess’s tender meat.”

Zhao Qian was greatly embarrassed and tried to use her hands to fend him off but the ultimate winner is naturally Xiang Shaolong and his hands reached into her clothes through the sleeves and started having fun with the tender flesh inside.

The pretty princess’s body totally softened as she curled into his arms as she accepted her beloved’s attack with a mixture bashfulness and joy, saying gently at the same time, “It’s snowing outside!”

Xiang Shaolong’s hands were enjoying themselves so how can he possibly be bothered if it’s snowing outside. He went close to her face as he continued his caress and said, “Is what I am doing now considered stealing what I’m supposed to guard?”

Zhao Qian guffawed and stroked his face a few times with her finger to signify that he should be feeling ashamed.

Xiang Shaolong’s felt warmth in his heart.

Ancient beauties are even better than 21st century beauties. Because in this society where men are the center, their entire life is dependant on men, so they are more caring, more giving, not keeping away any part of themselves at all.

Zhao Qian suddenly thought of Ji Yanran and said, “Do you know that Sister Yanran is not a Wei, but the descendant of Yue royalty. That’s why she’s so beautiful and her martial arts so good.”

Xiang Shaolong asked in puzzlement, “How do you know?”

Zhao Qian replied, “Of course I know it, when you were unconscious, we talked a lot.” She paused and continued with a smile, “Make a guess why the state of Han sent Master Han Fei who is not eloquent at all to come here and borrow rations? It turns out that the King of Wei is frustrated with him trying to urge him to change policies all the time, so he deliberately gave him an impossible mission so as to humiliate him.”

Xiang Shaolong shook his head and sighed, “The state of Han is weak enough, and now there’s such a muddleheaded King who use such a serious matter of borrowing grains to vent his temper.”

Zhao Qian replied, “But the King of Wei made a wrong guess. Because Master Han Fei has Sister Yanran to help him persuade the King of Wei, who finally agreed to lend them rations. But of course the loan will have to be repaid.”

Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “Something is not quite right. It seems that Wei will really attack Zhao, or else there’s no need for them to be so nice to Han.”

Zhao Qian pouted, “Let’s not talk about such dampening matters, all right?”

Xiang Shaolong hurriedly apologized and laughed, “Come! Let me take a look at Princess’s pretty legs!” and he reached out his hands to remove her robes.

Zhao Qian screamed and leapt out from his arms.

Xiang Shaolong sat up and moved to her side before stretching his body lazily and groaned in comfort before yelling out incoherently, "Come! Let us do something great that will be unforgettable for the rest of our lives!"

3 days later, the ships entered the border of Han.

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Qian bid their farewells to Han Fei and Han Fei ordered his man to bring them a handsome and extremely excellent horse that is totally black in color, saying, "Brother Xiang! This is Miss Ji's most beloved horse, and she especially told me to bring it along for you to use on your journey."

Zhao Qian exclaimed with an 'Ah!', recognizing it to be the handsome horse that Ji Yanran rode that night while saving them and happily caressed its head.

Xiang Shaolong saw how the beauty has once again helped them and can't help but miss her, heaving a great sigh.

Naturally Han Fei understands his feelings and as he shook his hand in farewell, he said, "The trip to Wei this time, my biggest gain is getting to know a confidante like Yanran and a great hero with ambitions like Brother Xiang. This horse is named Jifeng (Gust of Wind). Take care!"

Xiang Shaolong recollected his emotions and bounded up Jifeng with Zhao Qian, speeding away like lightning and from far away they could still see Han

Fei waving at them.

The 2 of them traveled by day and rested by night, traveling along the Han border up north towards Zhao.

Ji Yanran also prepared rations and a simple tent for them as well as some necessities needed for camping so that they need not worry over such matters.

Their mood during the return to Zhao is a lot different then when they were going to Wei. Now they're more relaxed and Zhao Qian has tasted for the first time the joining between a man and a woman and has changed from a girl into a woman. She's as happy as a lark and kept singing tunes from Zhao in Xiang Shaolong's ears, giving him another sense of enjoyment.

The more the travel up north, the colder it got and when it started snowing, they had to find caves to hide in.

10 odd days later, they reached the wide forests of the Han border and after this area they will once again enter Wei border. It will take another 3 days before they can reach Zhao's border.

This is a famous hunting ground in Han, with low hills and valleys, with a mixture of pine trees and trees with wide leaves growing there as well as a large variety of other trees.

Black bears, horses, deer, mountain goats, wild rabbits etc can be seen everywhere as well as wild wolves, who sometimes ran after the horse in a

pack. Xiang Shaolong had to kill a few with his needles and the wild wolves stopped to fight over and consume the bodies and finally stopped chasing them.

Both of them on one horse, galloping through the snowy forest with a layer of snow cloaked over the trees. The pure and clean scene is enough to take one's breath away.

This day they came to the western bank of a long river, the heart of the river has not yet turned to ice and the water reflected the snow and sun, flowing towards the northeast.

The weather turned harsher. The both of them were heavily wrapped up to their heads in thick cotton robes and on top of that wore cloaks to keep out the wind and all these could barely keep them warm from the snow.

The snow on the ground was up to knee level and even Jifeng had difficulty walking through it so they had no choice but to dismount and walk, hoping to find a family where they can spend the night with and hide from the snow.

Although it was bitterly cold, the scene of the endless snowy forest, the ever changing snowflakes are enough to take this pair of lovers' breaths away.

Silence surrounded them, with only the sounds of their feet stepping on the soft snow can be heard.

Once in a while the roars of a ferocious tiger or howls of a wild wolf could be heard from the distance, making their hair stand.

At noon, the wind suddenly blew madly and the snowflakes flew haphazardly around like thousands of silver needles, shooting towards them, making them unable to keep their eyes open and their steps unsteady. After a while, Jifeng refused to move further.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that no matter what they have to avoid this blizzard, but there no one in front of them, neither did they pass by any houses. Suddenly he remembered how he learnt to build an Eskimo's igloo while in military training, which is quick to make and appropriate. He suddenly felt like a kid again and went to the riverbank and using his sharp knife, dug out frozen blocks of ice from the river. Under Zhao Qian's doubtful stare, he made a large ice house enough to house man and beast. He used the tent as a blanket and even chopped some wood and started setting up a fire inside and soon the whole house was warm and cozy. The blizzard became a romantic and fun event instead. Even Jifeng regained his usual calm.

Zhao Qian saw how capable her beloved is and all the more she idolizes him and sincerely wanted to make him feel good and enjoy her gentleness.

The 2 of them slept naked under the blanket, their limbs intertwined, whispering never-ending sweet nothings to each other and in the end fell into a sweet sleep in each other's arms. At dawn, they were suddenly startled awake by a strange noise.

They listened carefully and it turned out to be the sounds of birds happily playing as they flew across the sky. They got up and looked out the small snow window cut out for ventilation and saw that the sky is now clear and

the blizzard has stopped falling.

They were ecstatic and hurriedly packed up, finally leaving that igloo filled with sweet memories with a tinge of sadness.

Xiang Shaolong was afraid that Jifeng would be too cold so he wrapped up it's limbs with cotton strips and the belly as well so that the cold will not penetrate into its organs. He also made a simple sled and put all their luggage on it so that Jifeng can pull it along with Xiang Shaolong leading him and Zhao Qian walking along by his side as they continued their journey north. By now they cannot tell if the land they're walking on belongs to Zhao or Wei. After all, borders are something made by men and nature itself will definitely not adhere to it.

The sheltered Zhao Qian was tired after walking less than half a mile and sat on the sled, letting Jifeng pull her along effortlessly.

The forest looks like it's filled with layers of tall walls, never ending as they weaved through it, making them feel as if they're lost in a maze. Luckily Xiang Shaolong is experienced in military travel and while the weather was clear a few days earlier, he found the position of the Polar Star and ascertained his location so they did not travel towards the wrong direction.

Snow was stacked up beneath their feet and occasionally they would see the prints of animals on the snow crisscrossing one another, making it into a strange and unique drawing. Naturally they also left behind them another set of endless scars.

The weather won't stay good for long, and it started snowing after noon, getting bigger as well.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly troubled, just as he was wondering if they should stop or continue, 7 wooden huts appeared amongst the trees towards their left.

The 2 of them were overjoyed as they went towards the houses.

The few wooden houses were built on a foundation of stone and made of pine wood with railings surrounding the house. There was snow packed on the roof and tall trees surrounded the front and back of the houses, making it a picturesque scene.

They liked what they saw on first sight and came to the front of the house and called out loudly but there was no reply.

Zhao Qian suddenly screamed and pointed at the entrance of the largest house, only to see it filled with bloodstains, the scene utterly shocking.

Xiang Shaolong walked closer for a look and realized that the bloodstains were still quite fresh, obviously the incident happened not too long ago. Therefore he instructed Zhao Qian to wait outside while he went into the house alone. Not long after he came out with a solemn expression and after checking the other houses, returned to Zhao Qian's side and said, "Qian'er don't be startled, a terrible crime and tragedy just happened here. It seems that all the men, women, old and young were all gathered to this house in the middle and slaughtered. Even the dogs were not let off, and the women



had signs of being raped.”

Zhao Qian’s expression paled as she asked, “Who did such a cruel thing?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Either horse thieves or army troops, or else they would not have so easily taken control of these strong hunters.”

Zhao Qian stammered, “What should we do?”

Before Shaolong could reply, hoof beats were heard.

Their feelings still unsettled, they turned around to take a look, only to see a person on top of a horse coming towards them. A huge burly man was seated on the horse and behind the horse he carried a pair of hunted wild deer.

That person is about 25 or 26 years old, his arms stouter than an average person’s, his eyes gleaming, his face rough and gallant with a great aura about him. He saw them from afar and called out in greeting, “Friends, where are you from!” and added, “Teng Yi is back!”

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Qian exchanged a look, both feeling sad for this returning man.

The burly man called Teng Yi slowed down his horse’s progress, a strange look came over his eyes as he looked at the houses with no family coming out to welcome him, obviously feeling that something is not quite right.

Xiang Shaolong went forward first to block him and said earnestly, “Friend,

please listen to me first.”

Teng Yi jumped off his horse nimbly and asked him coldly, “Who are you people?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “We’re just passing by, inside...”

Teng Yi pushed him away as he shouted, “Move aside!”

With Xiang Shaolong’s weight and steady stance, to be pushed aside like that, and although he was caught unawares, it can be seen that this Teng Yi has amazing arm strength.

Teng Yi dashed into the house like the wind, followed by an earth shattering and heart rending cry. Men truly do not cry easily, unless they are really heart broken!

Zhao Qian felt her nose stifling and leaned onto Xiang Shaolong’s shoulders and wept as well.

There was a wild roar and Teng Yi rushed out with bloodshot eyes and his sword in his hand, pointing at Xiang Shaolong and asked, “Did you do this.”

Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Qian looked at each other in shock.

Obviously extreme grief and fury has made Teng Yi lose his normal senses and he slashed towards his head with the sword.

Xiang Shaolong is already well prepared and pulled out his wooden sword and forcefully blocked this blow while pushing Zhao Qian away with his other hand.

Xiang Shaolong felt his arm go numb from blocking that blow and just as he was secretly thinking that this person's arm strength is comparable to Xiao Weimou, Teng Yi has made another attack like a crazed tiger. His swordplay was wide and extremely intricate and excellent.

Xiang Shaolong never expected to meet such a frightening swordsman in this wild snowy forest and dared not even split his concentration to try to explain. He followed the Mozi swordplay and only defended, not attacking and retreating as he fought. After blocking off his opponent's 100 odd attacks, Teng Yu suddenly cried out piteously and knelt down on the ground, holding his head and sobbing bitterly.

Zhao Qian ran over in fear and hid behind Xiang Shaolong as she called out, "Big man! We didn't kill those people inside."

Teng Yi nodded his head as he cried, "I know! You're using a wooden sword and there are no bloodstains on you. It's just that fury got to my head." He then continued crying in the snow.

Teng Yi knelt in front of the newly erected tombstones, his expression wooden.

Right below, buried were his parents, brothers, wife and children.

A self-sufficing happy life is no longer something he has.

He doesn't even know who his enemy is, so he can only use all his effort and life to find them.

Hatred was gnawing at his bleeding heart.

Zhao Qian cried along with him.

Xiang Shaolong came up to Teng Yi's side and asked solemnly, "Does Brother Teng want to take revenge!"

Teng Yi suddenly lifted his head, a look of resolution shot out from his eyes as he said, "If Brother Xiang can allow me to avenge this hatred, I will give you my life."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this person's sword skill is excellent and his martial arts outstanding as well. If he has his help, it'll be even better. He nodded his head, "Did Brother Teng think why the thieves would gather everyone into one house?"

Teng Yi was stunned as he replied, "They're thinking of keeping the other 6 houses for use."

Xiang Shaolong was extremely impressed with his quick thinking and said, "So they will definitely come back, and it will be before dusk."

A strong look of hatred came over Teng Yi's eyes and he leaned forward to

kiss the know before coming towards Xiang Shaolong and grabbing his shoulders, said with gratitude, “Thank you! You’d better be on your way! Or else it’ll be even more dangerous if you bump into them.”

Xiang Shaolong smiled, “If you want to kill all your enemies, then you should not ask me to leave.”

Teng Yi looked at Zhao Qian and shook his head, “Your little wife is both pretty and kind hearted, I do not wish harm to befall her. Although my 3 brothers are not as good as me, but they’re not easily trifled with as well so obviously the enemy is a big group and highly skilled. We might not be able to fight and win them.”

Xiang Shaolong said with confidence, “If it’s a head on attack, naturally we’re not their match but now that we’re planning something against the unguarded, it’s another story altogether. There’s still some time left, we need to start preparing immediately.”

## **Chapter 8**

### **Revenge on the Snowy grounds**

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Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi sat on the 2 sides of the window inside the house, waiting quietly for the cruel enemy to arrive. Teng Yi's emotions have calmed down, revealing the collected and stable composure of a highly skilled fighter but the pain and sadness in his eyes was intensified. Xiang Shaolong wanted to keep his mind away and asked, "Has Brother Teng been hunting here for a living since young?"

Teng Yi was silent for a moment before saying quietly, "To tell you the truth, I once had the dream of doing a little something for Han so I was in the military before and even raised to the position of commander. Later I saw that the people on top were too much, they only know how to belittle talents and pander to outsiders so disheartened, I brought my family with me to live in seclusion here. But who'd expect..."

Sounds of hoof beats were heard. The 2 of them were immediately energized and stood up to look outside the window. Amongst the falling snowflakes, in the silvery white world outside, a group of men and horses rode towards them slowly. Xiang Shaolong was stunned on seeing the scene and exclaimed hoarsely, "There's at least 60 to 70 people!" Teng Yi replied coldly, "It's 90 to 100."

Xiang Shaolong took a closer look and looked back at him in surprise, saying with a nod, "Your observation is very accurate." Teng Yi said, "Brother Xiang,

you better leave! Just with the 2 of us, even with the traps we won't be able to handle so many people." Xiang Shaolong was originally feeling numb and was toying with the idea of retreating but now that he knows that Teng Yi has his mind made up to fight to the death, his valor was stirred instead and he said seriously, "Brother Teng do not be pessimistic so quickly. As long as we can persevere a little longer, once the sky turns dark, it'll be beneficial to our movement. Humph! I, Xiang Shaolong, is not one to retreat at the last moment."

Teng Yi looked at him in gratitude before focusing all his attention on the slowly approaching enemy. By now the sky is slowly darkening and Xiang Shaolong looked hard before he exclaimed in shock, "It's Xiao Weimou!" And he felt a strong surge of apology.

Teng Yi had already heard his story and was stunned, "It's Xiao Weimou from the state of Qi!" He sighed and continued, "Brother Xiang need not blame yourself, this has got nothing to do with you. You're a victim as well!" Xiang Shaolong saw how understanding he was and felt a little better and at the same time gained more admiration for this highly skilled swordsman who is willing to lead a peaceful and boring life.

By now the large group came to the empty space in front of the houses and dismounted. The house that Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi were hiding in was where the tragedy happened so logically, Xiao Weimou's men won't step in here. Xiao Weimou looked gloomy and Zhen Lei stood next to him, his expression not any better either.

Looking at his men move the saddles and luggage from the horses back and

moving them into the other houses, Xiao Weimou cursed and fumed, “I’m definitely not wrong. Xiang Shaolong pretended to escape to Chu but that is just a trick. If he wants to return to Zhao, there’s only 3 ways. I bet he will not dare to travel through our Great Qi and the state of Wei, so the only route left is this path in Han, but why is it that we still cannot find him?” Zhen Lei commented, “We came here by ships and traveled on the official paths, so it’s not strange that we’ll be about 10 days faster than him. Now we will stop and set a trap here and once he passes by this place, he’ll certainly not be able to escape unnoticed from the 10 odd sentry posts we set up.”

Xiao Weimou replied, “Remember not to hurt Zhao Qian!” After he spoke he walked towards the house Xiang and Teng were hiding in. The both of them were overjoyed and moved separately to the 2 huge windows next to the door and raised their bows, getting ready to shoot as soon as he steps within shooting distance. Zhen Lei called out, “Head! That house...”

Xiao Weimou grinned fiendishly, “Such an exciting sight, it’s good to see it one more time. I love to see women who has been raped and killed by me.” And then he walked forward with large strides. Xiang and Teng were ecstatic, as they got ready.

Suddenly someone cried out from afar, “Head! Something’s wrong! There are fresh graves here.” Xiang and Teng instantly regretted their actions. They did not expect Xiao Weimou to be so cautious as to send his men to take a look around. They know that the chance is not to be missed and the sound of the bows rang as 2 arrows shot out the window towards Xiao Weimou. At that point in time that fiend was about 300 steps away from them and on hearing the swishing of the air he was startled and immediately dodged aside.



He could have avoided both the arrows but because Xiang Shaolong knows that he's very nimble, he deliberately shot a little to the side so although he avoided Teng Yi's arrow, he could not avoid Xiang Shaolong's arrow, which shot through his shoulder. He cried out in pain as he fell backwards. A pity that it did not strike any of his vital points but it's enough to make him suffer.

At this point in time almost half of the 100 men were already in the 6 houses while the rest of the 40 odd men outside all cried out in alarm and dashed towards the house they were hiding in. Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi hurriedly retreated towards the back door and once they reached the back of the house, they lighted the fire arrows and shot them towards the other houses.

These roofs and pine wood walls have all been tampered by them and a layer of inflammable pine oil has been poured on it so once it made contact with fire the flames spread immediately through the whole house and even the windows and doors were smeared with them. With the northern wind blowing, those who went into the houses seems to be in a space where they are cut off from the outside world and after traveling for the whole day, they all lied down to rest, not knowing that something has happened outside. By the time they realized something was wrong, the whole house was engulfed in flames. For a moment screams were heard everywhere, as if it's hell on earth.

The 10 odd men who were running towards the house saw that they were about to reach the steps to the house when they suddenly felt the ground give way and they fell into the trap that Xiang and Teng made earlier, into a deep hole more than 10 feet deep and filled with pointed spikes so there's no way they can stay alive even with luck. In that instant, more than half of the

almost 100 enemies were either killed or injured and even the leader Xiao Weimou was injured.

With fire seemingly shooting out from his eyes, Teng Yi roared as he dashed out, killing everyone on sight. Xiang Shaolong dashed out from the other side, 2 flying needles flew out and killed 2 bewildered thieves before he drew out his wooden sword and killed his way towards the direction of Xiao Weimou.

Xiang Weimou was being helped up by Zhen Lei and another man and he felt the intense pain on his shoulder where the arrow injured him as he moved. He knows that he cannot fight and although he saw his greatest enemy Xiang Shaolong, there's nothing he can do except grind his teeth in hatred and now that there's only 20 odd men left, he cried out angrily, "Let's leave!" Zhen Lei and his man hurriedly helped him towards the nearest warhorse as they left in a hurry.

Xiang Shaolong looked around and shouted, "Xiao Weimou is leaving!" The remaining thieves saw that it is indeed true and realized that the 2 of them were extremely highly skilled and although they have more people on their side, they could not take any advantage of them at all. In an instant their enemy killed another 5 of them and they all ran away in fear. Xiang Shaolong and Teng Yi saw that it's a chance not to be missed and they went after Xiao Weimou.

A few men who were loyal to Xiao Weimou turned back to stop them but they were soon gotten rid of by these 2 ferocious and highly skilled fighters. After Xiang Shaolong kicked a man flying away, he soon caught up with Xiao Weimou. Zhen Lei saw that they still have another 10 odd steps before

reaching the horse so he pulled out his sword and turned back to block Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong shouted, “Teng Yi! Give chase!” as he slashed towards Zhen Lei. Zhen Lei is indeed a highly skilled fighter and blocked the blow with his own sword. He dashed forward without fear for himself and for a moment the sounds of swords slashing in the air was heard and the fight was intense. The worse thing is that Zhen Lei is fighting with the thought of perishing together with the enemy and for the time being there’s nothing much Xiang Shaolong can do but to wait for the moment his attacks turn a little weaker. By now Xiao Weimou has jumped onto the horse. Teng Yi arrived just in time and slashed with his sword. One of the men was about to turn around to fight but was caught in the slash and he was thrown 7 steps back away by the impact, his blood spurting. This shows how strong is the hatred in his heart.

Xiao Weimou tolerated the intense pain as he clasped his legs around the horse’s belly and rode out. Teng Yi roared and he leapt forward, his great hand extending out and he actually managed to grab the horse’s back leg. The horse lost its balance as with a terrified neigh, fell down on the snow and Xiao Weimou was thrown off its back. Zhen Lei turned around for a look and was immediately terrified.

Xiang Shaolong was not one to miss the opportunity and he slashed thrice successively and on the 3rd slash, Zhen Lei’s long sword was thrown off and a huge opening was revealed. When Teng Yi leapt over and was tumbling around with Xiao Weimou, Xiang Shaolong’s wooden sword pierced forward like lightning and Zhen Lei gave out a horrifying cry before he was thrown back by the impact and died on the spot. At this time Xiao Weimou was

struggling, his hand pinching Teng Yi's throat and just as he was about to gather his strength to shatter the throat, Teng Yi pressed down hard on the arrow wound on his shoulder and the pain thoroughly numbed him for the moment and he loosened his grip as well.

Teng Yi sat on him and using his left hand, pulled out the arrow together with a piece of flesh as blood spurted out from the wound. Even as Xiao Weimou was reeling from the pain, his right fist was plummeting on his chest like a hammer more than 10 times and the sounds of bones breaking can be heard. Blood flowed out from the orifices of Xiao Weimou's face and he died horribly on the spot. Teng Yi then fell off his body and crouched on the snow, crying bitterly.

Unexpectedly, Xiang Shaolong found his lost Flying Rainbow on Xiao Weimou's body and a wave of feelings rushed upon him. When Xiang Shaolong carried Zhao Qian up from the hidden hold underground, Zhao Qian was pale from worry and her delicate body was trembling.

The heavy snow stopped, stars filled the sky, pretty and alluring. Xiang Shaolong kissed her fragrant lips lovingly and carried her up by her waist and walked towards the graves. Teng Yi cut off Xiao Weimou's head and put it in front of the graves with incense as an offering.

Xiang Shaolong put Zhao Qian down and asked, "What does Brother Teng intend to do from now on?" Teng Yi said calmly, "I have nothing left, except for my life and my sword, and I have no other concerns. If Brother Xiang doesn't mind, I will follow you in future. I am not afraid of any hardship or danger, or even death, as it will end this pitiful fate of mine!" Xiang Shaolong

was overjoyed as he replied, “I’d really love it, but Brother Teng need not wallow in sadness. You should get back your fighting spirit and start a new life!” Teng Yi shook his head, “Brother Xiang will not understand the feelings I have for my wife, children and family. They are everything to me, now that I have nothing left, besides the gratitude I feel for Brother Xiang, I will no longer have any feelings for anyone else. That is too painful.”

Zhao Qian felt her nose sniffing, and started weeping. Teng Yi sighed, “Ai! Weepy little princess!” Xiang Shaolong hugged Zhao Qian as he said offhandedly, “Xiao Weimou’s head will be worth a lot, does Brother Teng have any way of preserving it!” Teng Yi replied, “That’s easy, just leave it to me!”

With Teng Yi with them who is familiar with the environment, their journey became a lot smoother. Not only is he an outstanding hunter, he’s also an expert in barbeque and knows how to season the food with wild herbs and plants, gaining much compliments from Xiang and Zhao on the food. Teng Yi treated nature as if it is a religion, believing that there are various types of deities in nature so whenever they came to a new place, he’ll kiss the soil and pray for luck.

5 days later, they reached a large village near the border of Wei. There were a few hundred houses and a few animal enclosures scattered on the wide snowy plains and the scene looked beautiful and peaceful. It’s really a paradise that one can hide away from in this chaotic warring period.

Not only is Teng Yi very familiar with the people here, he’s also well respected. A few young shepherd saw him arriving and immediately flew

back to the village to report and some even came to welcome him with their gongs. Zhao Qian found all of these interesting and revealed a sweet smile, making Xiang Shaolong feel like carrying her into the room immediately and spend the night together.

Along the way there're always men, women, old and young who walked over to greet Teng Yi, the men can't help but stare at Zhao Qian while the women were stealing glances at Xiang Shaolong. 10 odd dogs came out from all over the place and ran after their horses, shaking their heads and tails at Teng Yi, showing their welcome.

"Brother Teng!" The sound came from the top. Both Xiang and Zhao were startled and lifted their head to look only to see a skinny youth about 16 or 17 years old with long limbs. He's not considered handsome, but he has a suave, happy-go-lucky air about him with a happy and honest smile, his 2 legs swinging as he sat on the branch of a huge tree filled with snow about 3 feet off the ground, making one worry that if he were to lose his balance and fall, that'd be terrible.

Zhao Qian exclaimed in alarm, "Be careful! Stop shaking!" That youth went 'Ah!', as if he only realized the danger now and fumbled, all the more causing him to lose his balance as he fell. Zhao Qian was so frightened she closed her pretty eyes but did not hear the sound of anything heavy falling. When she opened her eyes, she saw the youth with his legs hanging off the tree, his arms around his chest and grinning at her as he blinked. Zhao Qian stared at him angrily, upset with him for putting on such an act to scare her. Xiang Shaolong was extremely impressed and complimented sincerely, "Friend, what great moves." Teng Yi shouted, "Jing Jun aren't you going to come

down!”

Jing Jun chortled and made 2 somersaults as if he’s making a performance before landing lightly and nimbly on the snowy ground before asking Zhao Qian, “This regal and pretty looking miss, may I ask if you already have a husband!” Zhao Qian stared at him with annoyance and thought that she is leaning so closely in Xiang Lang’s arms and yet he had to ask this question.

Teng Yi said unhappily, “Control your slick mouth! This is the royal 3rd Princess from the state of Zhao, how can you be so rude?” Jing Jun was stunned as he looked at Xiang Shaolong and shouted, “This must be Xiang Shaolong who defeated Hui Wu and Ren Lang!” Teng Yi and Xiang Shaolong exchanged looks of puzzlement before the former asked, “How did you know?”

Jing Jun replied, “I heard the Wei soldiers at the border talking about it. They instructed us to help them keep a look out for Master Xiang and the Princess and if I find out anything, they’ll give me a hundred taels of silver.”

Zhao Qian was frightened, “You wouldn’t do that right?” Jing Jun jumped up without any effort and did a back somersault before kneeling on the ground, his hand clasped around his fist as he said, “Of course I won’t. I have made a decision to follow Master Xiang and roam the outside world. Master Xiang please accept my request.” Xiang Shaolong felt a liking for this person and looked at Teng Yi, meaning that he will respect his thoughts on this.

Teng Yi nodded his head, “Jing Jun is the most outstanding hunter here and an expert in sneaky acts. I came especially to this village this time because I

would like Brother Xiang to meet this lad who dreams of roaming the outside world all the time.” Xiang Shaolong chortled, “Get up! Follow me in future then!”

Jing Jun was so happy he jumped up and made 3 continuous somersaults as he cried out, “Let me go and scout the roads first, I’ll certainly come back tomorrow morning with a report!” and he was far away in an instant. Xiang Shaolong saw how obedient he is and was secretly happy.

That night they stayed in the village head’s house and received the warmest welcome. During the feast, all the elders in the village came and it was extremely lively. Before bedtime, Teng Yi told the 2 of them. “If you hear any weird sounds tonight, do not come out, because someone will be here to kidnap the village head’s daughter.” Xiang and Zhao were perplexed and could not understand why would there be thieves stealing women away. Teng Yi explained, “This is a local custom, the night before the wedding there will be a ceremony to steal the bride away. Everyone will pretend nothing is happening and after the groom steals the girl home, they will consummate the marriage immediately. The next morning they will return to the girl’s home to hold the wedding ceremony. You can take part in the wedding feast as well.”

The sounds of drums shocked the lovers awake from their dreams. At this time the sky is not yet bright and Xiang and Zhao climbed out from under their warm blankets bleary eyed and hurriedly washed up and changed. By the time they walked to the hall, it’s already filled with people here to take part in the wedding ceremony. They were arranged, together with Teng Yi, to sit behind the family to view the ceremony.



The village head and his 4 wives were seated at the front row and the newly weds were dressed in red robes and crowns, each kneeling on one side and holding a basket of fresh fruits. The guests all clapped and sang to express their congratulations.

Zhao Qian was smiling from ear to ear and she went closer to Xiang Shaolong's ear and whispered, "Xiang Lang! Qian'er wants to wear a wedding outfit like that as well and marry you." He felt a sweetness in his heart and replied, "One day when we escape from Handan, we'll hold a wedding ceremony like theirs immediately, all right?" Zhao Qian nodded her head furiously.

At this time, someone tied strings made with 7 colors around the wrists of the newly weds and everyone gave their blessings like wishing them togetherness til old age and hearts joined forever. The ceremony is simple yet significant. After that they had a feast of more than 10 tables at the great ancestral hall in the middle of the village where the whole village attended. The little kids wearing new clothes were even more happy, using their laughter and noisy play to add to this joyous atmosphere.

As the wine warmed them up to their ears, Jing Jun returned and went behind Teng and Xiang, saying with a lowered voice, "The defences between Wei and Zhao are tighter than normal, everyone is keen on capturing Master Xiang and the Princess to get the reward. Luckily I know of a secret route via the water so if we take advantage of the snow and the cover of the night, we'll definitely be able to sneak back into Zhao." Xiang Shaolong said happily, "If only it'd start snowing soon!" Teng Yi looked up the sky and commented, "Don't worry! There will certainly be a heavy snowfall tonight."

Teng Yi's prediction truly did not disappoint as balls of snowflakes started falling since dusk. By now the 4 of them have already passed the border between Han and Wei and made their wooden rafts, to be controlled by Teng and Jing. With the water and wind going in the right direction, they safely returned within Zhao's border the next morning.

## Chapter 9

### Shocking and sad news

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The next day at dusk, the 4 of them arrived at the sentry post just inside the Zhao border and outside the city of the Zi district. By now Zhao Qian has dressed up as a man, masquerading as Jing Jun's younger brother and because none of the generals outside has ever seen this beautiful 3rd Princess, so as long as they're out of Handan, no one will be able to reveal her real identity.

The guard on top of the city walls called out to the 4 of them to stop and when he saw it's Xiang Shaolong, the guard immediately opened the gate to let them in without even waiting for his superior's instruction. His attitude was extremely respectful, which shows how well respected and famous Xiang Shaolong is within the Zhao army now. The truth is when Xiang Shaolong sent back the heads of the thieves he killed, the weapons and war horses back to Zhao after each victory, the first to know are usually these guards, so naturally they have a very high opinion of Xiang Shaolong.

Under the escort of the Zhao army, Xiang Shaolong and the rest rode towards the city of Zi. Zhao Qian's horse riding skills are quite good and sitting high atop the horse, looks like a handsome young man. Before they reach Zi, suddenly there was a team of Zhao soldiers riding towards them. The 2 groups slowly got closer to each other and Xiang Shaolong recognized the 2 leaders. One of them is the general in charge of defending the city, General Wa Che, and the other is shockingly his great enemy Zhao Mu. Zhao Qian and

Xiang Shaolong's expressions changed. But by now it's too late to avoid them so they can only grit their teeth and move forward.

Zhao Mu hastened his horse and came forward with Wa Che hurrying to keep up with him. The 2 groups met and all of them dismounted. Zhao Mu saw Zhao Qian dressed as a man and immediately recognized her, his eyes shone with greed as he knelt down and paid his respects, "The Marquis of Julu pays his respect to Third Princess!" This shocked Wa Che and the rest so much that they hurriedly fell to their knees in respect. Xiang Shaolong was secretly lamenting that Zhao Mu's sudden appearance has spoiled what he thought was a perfect arrangement, and now he has to deal with the outcome if Zhao Qian is found to have lost her virginity. Zhao Qian was surprisingly calm as she said, "Marquis of Julu, please rise!"

This time it's Xiang Shaolong, together with Teng Yi and Jing Jun's turn to pay their respects to Zhao Mu. The 2 of them already knows the relationship between Xiang Shaolong and Zhao Mu so they pretended to be extremely respectful but of course were cursing the ancestors of this conniving fiend in their hearts.

Zhao Mu instructed Wa Che, "The 3rd Princess must have endured a lot of shock and suffering along the journey, send her quickly back to the city to rest." Zhao Qian was quite obedient and without even taking a look at Xiang Shaolong, followed Wa Che back.

Zhao Mu and Xiang Shaolong rode alongside each other and he complimented, "Lady Ya and Cheng Xu has already told what happened in Daliang to his Majesty. His Majesty is extremely pleased with how Shaolong

reacted to the situation and your intellect. The only problem is that muddle headed King Anli sent an envoy to blame his Majesty that he has not even set eyes on 3rd Princess and you've already kidnapped her. This matter is quite troublesome and it seems that more will come." Xiang Shaolong pretended to fully trust him and loyal as he said, "I hope that Marquis will say a few nice words in front of his Majesty for me." Zhao Mu replied insincerely, "That is but of course!"

He also asked about Teng Yi and Jing Jun. Xiang Shaolong replied, "They're Hans who have helped me and I have accepted them as my family servants." He did not mention anything about Xiao Weimou. Zhao Mu asked quietly, "Did Shaolong meet with any enemies on the way back?"

Xiang Shaolong's intuition told him that Zhao Mu's words are not as simple as it seems. Besides with Zhao Mu's status, why would he come here especially to wait for him? Or could it be that Zhao Mu and Xiao Weimou have some secret relationship? At the same time he remembered that Xiao Weimou once said that Zhao Qian must not be harmed, it could be because he promised Zhao Mu that he'll hand her to him.

He replied, "I met Xiao Weimou, and also chopped off his head!" Zhao Mu was stunned and asked hoarsely, "What?" Xiang Shaolong is all the more certain of his guess. If Zhao Mu is not sure of Xiao Weimou's ability, why else would he be so shocked. After he heard Xiang Shaolong repeat his words again, Zhao Mu was silent for a moment before he turned his head and stared at him, saying "According to our spies in Daliang, that night when you escaped from Prince Xinling's residence you were surrounded by Xiao Weimou and his men, but someone later saved you and sent you out of

Daliang. Who is that person?"

Xiang Shaolong is all the more certain that Zhao Mu is in cahoots with Xiao Weimou. Because at that time things happened so quickly, and the residents there dared not witness the fight for fear of getting trouble on themselves. Besides, onlookers would not know that they were surrounded by Xiao Weimou and his men, they would think that they're Wei soldiers. But now Zhao Mu is so certain of what happened, the only reason is that the news came from Xiao Weimou.

He was secretly cursing but on the surface he pretended to be nonchalant as he sighed, "I'd like to know who was that hero who saved me as well, but he left after taking me and the Princess away from danger, not even leaving us his name." Zhao Mu furrowed his brow, "Weren't you seriously injured then?" Xiang Shaolong was secretly chortling, thinking that evil fiend has finally let the cat out of the bag. If not for Xiao Weimou telling him, how would he have known that he was seriously injured. He pretended to be puzzled and looked at him, asking "Who told you that I was seriously injured, it's just all superficial wounds!"

Zhao Mu knows that he has revealed too much and coughed dryly to cover up his embarrassment. By now the team has entered the city walls of Zi. Xiang Shaolong thought to himself: Just come! Let's see who shall be the ultimate victor.

The next morning Xiang Shaolong, Zhao Mu and the rest started the journey as soon as it was bright. Following the official path they reached Handan 2 days later and entered the Palace immediately to see the King of Zhao. He

arranged for Teng Yi and Jing Jun to return to the Wu family first. The King of Zhao received him in the Politics Discussion Hall, and Zhao Mu was the only one accompanying him.

After respects was paid to the ruler, King Xiaocheng walked down the stone steps from his dragon throne and with his hands clasped behind his back, commented, “Shaolong! Tell me how I should deal with you? You successfully stole ‘Lu Gong’s Secret Manual’ and killed Hui Hu, eliminating a troublemaker for our Great Zhao and achieved great accomplishments. But you did not wait for my instructions and brought the 3rd Princess back on your own accord, making me go back on my words towards the Weis. Tell me! Should I reward or punish you.” Xiang Shaolong pretended to be astonished as he knelt down and said, “Your subordinate knows he’s made a mistake, but I was really forced by circumstances, the Weis were...”

The King of Zhao interrupted him, “No need for more words, whatever you wanted to say, my royal sister Lady Ya has already told me. But ultimately you did not accomplish the mission I gave you. If King Anli goes back on the marriage agreement, then just let him go back on his words. But now it has turned out that he is putting the blame on me, tell me how should I account for this?”

Xiang Shaolong felt fury rising up and almost wanted to strangle King Xiaocheng. A father who does not care about the happiness of his own daughter, how can he be fit to rule a country. He controlled his temper and removed the bag on his back which contained the head of Xiao Weimou and said, “Your Majesty can return Xiao Weimou’s head to the King of Wei and he will know that we have found out about his collaboration with Xiao Weimou,

then he will no longer pursue this matter!" The King of Zhao looked at the bag in surprise, then looked at Zhao Mu, not quite knowing what to do with Xiang Shaolong's suggestion.

Zhao Mu pretended to be the good guy and said, "Shaolong, you've made a very bold suggestion. But the King of Wei can always deny his relationship with Xiao Weimou, or even say that you're setting him up. Hai! Shaolong is still inexperienced indeed."

Xiang Shaolong expected that this conniving thief would say this so he said with a smile, "Both they and us are just looking for excuses! Your Majesty need only tell Anli that I was trying to save the Princess, that's why I escaped back to Handan in order to hide from Xiao Weimou's pursuit. It's simply not safe within Wei's borders. If the Weis want to marry the Princess, then ask him to send someone here to escort the Princess, let's see what he will do?" Zhao Mu did not expect Xiang Shaolong to come out with such a plan and for a moment had no argument.

The King of Zhao was stunned for a moment before nodding his head, "This is a good idea to round things up. We'll do just that and see how that old man Anli is going to react?" He then told Xiang Shaolong, "For now I'll take it that your accomplishments have atoned for your mistakes and you can keep your current position. Rest well for the next few days! If there's anything else I will summon you into the Palace." Xiang Shaolong was relieved and hurriedly bid his leave.

Xiang Shaolong had just stepped out of the Palace gates when Cheng Xu came up. However there was no joy of meeting after a long absence and



instead he lowered his voice and said seriously, “Lady Ya is waiting for Commander Xiang.”, followed by a sigh. Xiang Shaolong feels a dark omen and taking a deep breath, asked, “What happened?” Extreme sadness shot out of Cheng Xu’s eyes as he gritted his teeth and said, “Lady Ni is dead!” Xiang Shaolong was stunned, “What?”

Cheng Xu said dejectedly, “It happened on the 3rd day after you left. When the maid went to her room that morning, she saw her holding a sharp dagger. Her belly had a fatal wound and the bed was stained red by her blood.” Xiang Shaolong felt as if he is falling from Heaven straight into hell, the blood in his body turning cold, his chest felt as if it has been pounded by a thousand kilo force, his breathing difficult and all the strength in his body suddenly disappearing. He staggered and almost fell to the ground if not for Cheng Xu supporting him.

His face turned as pale as paper and tears fell uncontrollably down his cheeks. He thought of Lady Ni’s love and elegance, yet such a horrible death befell her, is there justice in the world? After Cheng Xu steadied him on his feet, Xiang Shaolong said through gritted teeth, “She certainly will not commit suicide, don’t those maids know anything?” Cheng Xu sighed, “That’s all we know upon our return. Now all those maids have been dismissed and we can’t even find one of them to question. Those in court are fearful of Zhao Mu and dared not ask too many questions. His Majesty is now totally under Zhao Mu’s control and will not object to anything he says.”

Xiang Shaolong exclaimed hoarsely, “Zhao Mu?” And he slowly understood. Zhao Mu saw that Lady Ni has given in to him and was extremely jealous so he secretly went to rape Zhao Ni. Zhao Ni was distraught after the shameful

ordeal so she used death to wash off her shame. That conniving thief Zhao Mu, who is worst than an animal! A sudden stab of pain and sadness rushed to his heart and Xiang Shaolong finally broke down and wept bitterly.

Xiang Shaolong hugged Zhao Ya tightly, as if he's afraid that she will suddenly disappear like Zhao Ni. Lady Ya cried hot tears together with him and wailed, "Xiang Lang! Brace yourself, all the more Zhao Mu will not let you and the Wu family off. If you don't pull yourself together we'll all die under his hands sooner or later." Xiang Shaolong asked, "Where is Xiao Pan?"

Lady Ya replied, "For now he is under the care of my royal sister. This child is indeed strange, after crying for a few days, he kept quiet and has not cried since, only saying that he wants to wait for your return." As she spoke the last words, Zhao Pan's voice could be heard screaming madly from outside, "Teacher!" Xiang Shaolong pushed Lady Ya aside and hugged Zhao Pan who had ran into his arms.

This little lad has lost a lot of weight and he cried bitterly, "Teacher! It's Zhao Mu that conniving thief who cause Mother to die, I feel such deep hatred in my heart!" Xiang Shaolong became calmer instead and asked, "Tell me what happened that night." Zhao Pan replied, "I don't know anything at all. That day his Majesty sent someone to bring over some snacks and I fell into a deep sleep after eating it. When I woke up Mother is already dead and even her body had been moved away. Mother is so pitiful!" and he cried bitterly again.

Lady Ya couldn't control her sadness and leaned on Xiang Shaolong's back and sobbed uncontrollably and a cloud of despair surrounded them. Xiang

Shaolong reached out to hug Lady Ya and said quietly, "From today onwards, Xiao Pan you will follow your royal Aunt Ya. We must certainly avenge your mother, but we cannot act rashly or else it'll only give that conniving thief an excuse to deal with us, understand?" Zhao Pan nodded his head vigorously, "Xiao Pan understands totally. All these time I have been practicing my swordplay everyday as you have instructed. I want to kill Zhao Mu personally."

Xiang Shaolong told Zhao Ya, "Ya'er, take good care of Xiao Pan. For now Zhao Mu will not dare to do anything to you and Qian'er, but it's still better to be careful. Will you be able to get Qian'er out of the palace to stay with you at your residence outside the palace, and at the same time tell Zhao Da and the rest to increase defenses and not give Zhao Mu any opportunities?" Zhao Ya replied, "Although Imperial brother usually does not bother himself with Princess Qian's matters, now because of her marriage agreement with the Weis, it might be a bit difficult to get her out of the Palace. But I will think of a way. After I retrieved the 'Secret Manual', Imperial Brother has regarded me highly, maybe I can persuade him." Xiang Shaolong thought of something and after telling Zhao Pan to leave first, he told Zhao Ya that he's already having a physical relationship with Zhao Qian.

Zhao Ya's expression changed, "What shall we do? Zhao Mu will certainly coerce Imperial brother to give orders to check if Zhao Qian is still intact. If they find a problem, they'll definitely not let you off." Xiang Shaolong replied, "Zhao Mu is extremely distracted right now and may not think of this point for now." He continued with a furrowed brow, "Just how do you determine if Qian'er is still a virgin?" Zhao Ya replied, "Mainly is to see if her hymen is still intact."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought so that's the case and asked, "Who will do the inspection?" Zhao Ya replied, "It should be the empress who inspects personally, because of Zhao Qian's royal status, no one else is allowed to touch her body." Xiang Shaolong thought of the Zhao empress and a thread of hope filled his heart as he said, No matter what, try to get Qian'er away from the dangerous Palace first, then we'll think of how to deal with Zhao Mu."

By now Tao Fang has arrived with Wu Tingfang and Ting Fangshi and after the long parting, the reunion is certainly a joyful one. If not for the death of Lady Ni, this would be the happiest moment in his life, but now it's a different matter altogether. In the secret chamber in the Wu family stronghold, they held the first important meeting since Xiang Shaolong's return. Besides Master Wu, Wu Yingyuan and Tao Fang, there's also the leader of the family soldiers Wu Zhuo. Now he has become Xiang Shaolong's closest and most reliable battle mate.

Master Wu first expressed his admiration towards Xiang Shaolong, "Shaolong has outdone himself in Wei and his actions have caused quite a stir. Now everyone regards Shaolong as Zhao's most promising person. But at the same time it has aroused the jealousy of Zhao Mu's gang." Wu Yingyuan said, "Now we have no other choice but to throw in our lot with the Qins. That's the only chance of surviving, or else we'll just be sitting and waiting to die."

Everyone's heart was heavy. Besides Qin and Zhao, of the remaining 5 states, Wei and Qi all hates Xiang Shaolong to the core, Yan has trouble protecting herself and is currently under attack by Lian Po while Han is weak. The remaining state of Chu is too far away and they don't have many connections with the Wu family as well. Therefore the only way out is to join Qin.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly laughing bitterly to himself. When he came to the warring states period on the time machine, he had intended to ally himself with Emperor Qin who has fallen on bad times here but later troubles kept coming one after another and he did not even have time to take a breather. He did not expect that after all the twists and turns, he'll ended up back on this old road. Wu Yingyuan continued, "I just made contact last month with the man Tu Xian sent." Looking at Xiang Shaolong's lost look, he explained, "Tu Xian is Lu Buwei's best family warrior, having both brains and bravery with excellent sword skill. He's on quite good terms with me."

He continued with a sigh, "According to Tu Xian, although Qin's King Zhuangxiang ascended the throne, but because everyone suspects that he killed King Xiaowen with Lu Buwei and King Zhuangxiang has been staying in Zhao for a long period of time, it's very difficult for Lu Buwei to become the premier for now." Tao Fang's expression paled, "If Lu Buwei is thrown out, it'll be the end for us too." Master Wu said, "We're now secretly helping Lu Buwei in various ways. Luckily this person is very experienced and cunning, he'll not be kicked out so easily. As long as King Zhuangxiang stands on his side, there will be a way."

Wu Yingyuan said, "This is the most important point. The woman King Zhuangxiang loves most is Zhu Ji (Concubine Zhu) and the son he pampers most is Ying Zheng. As long as we can send mother and son back to Xianyang, we'll be able to capture King Zhuangxiang's heart tightly. We're the only ones who can accomplish this matter, although it will be a difficult task." Tao Fang was afraid that Xiang Shaolong would not understand and explained, "Zhu Ji was originally Lu Buwei's beloved mistress and in order to make King Zhuangxiang happy, he gave her to him to become his wife."

Master Wu said, “This woman’s beauty can rival a country and is very good in flirting and handling men. She’s also extremely loyal to Lu Buwei, so if we have her next to King Zhuangxiang, we can guarantee that King Zhuangxiang will not be against Lu Buwei.” Xiang Shaolong can’t help but ask, “So is Ying Zheng the son of Lu Buwei or King Zhuangxiang, how old is he this year.”

Wu Yingyuan was stunned, “I’m afraid the only person who knows is Zhu Ji. Ying Zheng was born before the battle of Chang Ping, so he should be more than 13 years old now, most likely between 15 or 16 years old.” Xiang Shaolong was perplexed, according to history books, Emperor Qin was only 13 when he ascends the throne a few years later. How can it be possible that the history books are so wrong.

Wu Yingyuan said, “I’ve made an agreement with Tu Xian and will try to send Zhu Ji and her son back to Xianyang in the shortest time possible. So the most important task at hand now is not to kill Zhao Mu, but to try and make contact with Zhu Ji and her son to see how we can stealthily take them out of Handan.” Xiang Shaolong asked somberly, “How many useful men do we have on hand right now?”

Wu Zhuo replied, “We have 2 groups of warriors under us, one group are the good fighters we attracted from the various states but these people are not reliable and may very well run away when something happens. The other group are the orphans I adopted for Godfather from various places and the blood relations of the Wu family, which amounts to about 2000 men and they are all trustworthy, willing to even lay their life down for the Wu family.” Xiang Shaolong asked, “If we want to move Zhu Ji and her son away, what would be the biggest obstacle?”

Tao Fang replied, "It's still that conniving thief Zhao Mu, the biggest problem is that he's made Ying Zheng so happy that he totally listens to him." Xiang Shaolong gritted his teeth, "That conniving thief again!"

Master Wu said, "Do not belittle Zhao Mu. Not only has that fellow controlled King Xiaocheng, he's also joined forces with Guo Zhong, so the largest Warrior Association and Mohist group here will be on his side. Even Lian Po and Li Mu, generals who hold military powers in their hands dare not step too much on his toes. Shaolong now you're a thorn in his flesh, so you must be careful all the way or else you will die any time." Xiang Shaolong was stunned, "What is the Warrior Association?"

Tao Fang replied, "It's a place which specializes in training professional warriors. The Zhao Warrior Association's leader is Zhao Ba and he's extremely highly skilled. You have to be careful when you meet him, he is very powerful in Handan!" All of them discussed the finer details a little more before Xiang Shaolong returned to his Hidden Dragon Abode.

Tao Fang accompanied him as he walked, "Our men went to the valley you described at Mulberry Village. The house is still there but they've waited until now and there's still no sight of Mei Canniang. But don't you worry! I'm trying my best to find her." Now Xiang Shaolong has another thing to worry about. It's been more than a year since he came to this era and he's falling deeper both in terms of relationships and feelings. Sadness and happiness came at him alternatively, making the 21st century moving further away from him.

Sometimes it's difficult to differentiate, between these 2 eras, which seems more like a dream. Or maybe life is just a big dream. Time is just an illusion,

and the time machine is something that allows one to experience different illusions. Maybe even Crazy ma, who invented the time machine, has no answers to such confusing questions.

Tao Fang said, "I've arranged for that 2 friends of yours to stay at the courtyard next to your Hidden Dragon Abode. Heh! Jing Jun and Teng Yi are the exact opposites, his eyes gleamed when he sees beauties whereas Teng Yi has no interest in them at all, how strange!" Hidden Dragon Abode was just ahead so Xiang Shaolong stopped and summarized to Tao Fang the tragic fate that befell Teng Yi before he parted ways with Tao Fang and went to see Teng and Jing.

Jing Jun was hugging a pretty maid and enjoying himself but when he saw Xiang Shaolong he was startled and jumped up, looking a little lost. Xiang Shaolong laughed, "Enjoy all you want! No need to bother about me!" and he went into the inner hall to look for Teng Yi. Teng Yi was sitting quietly alone on the rug in deep thought, and might be thinking of his dead wife and family again. Xiang Shaolong sat next to him and explained to him the current situation.

Teng Yi replied after listening, "If there are 2000 death warriors, it won't be a problem to break out of the city, but it'll be more difficult to deal with pursuing soldiers. If possible, I'd like to personally train these 2000 people." Xiang Shaolong thought about it for a while before replying, "Let me discuss this with Wu Zhuo." Teng Yi said, "Just say I'll be his assistant! When it comes to military and wars, I once spent a lot of effort researching old and new military tactics. When I was a commander in the past, I've spent long periods fighting the Qins and Weis, so I have some insight and experience in this."



Xiang Shaolong knows that this person is not one who boasts so if he can say this out, he must be very confident. He said happily, "Then we should not delay! We'll go and discuss this with Wu Zhuo immediately." Teng Yi greatly admires Xiang Shaolong's way of putting action to words and gladly agreed. Xiang Shaolong brought him to meet Wu Zhuo and the 2 of them hit it off immediately, having discussions about military and battles and both lamenting that they should have got to know each other earlier.

Xiang Shaolong was secretly glad and afraid that Wu Tingfang would blame him for ignoring her, he left the 2 to their talk and left on his own. Lady Ni's death re-ignited the hatred he felt towards Zhao Mu and at the same time he learnt the importance of striking first. The most important task at hand is to make connection with Ying Zheng and after that it will be the time to escape from Handan. Once he thought of this, he can't help but start to miss Mei Canniang.

Heaven has already been very cruel to him, and he hopes that nothing unfortunate will happen to her. He should also learn to control himself, unless he really have the ability to protect the women he loves, or else he really shouldn't involve himself in more relationships. For those who knows Xiang Shaolong very well, they would know that this change in his thoughts can be quite unbelievable.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Each executing own strategies**

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Xiang Shaolong stepped into the main hall of Hidden Dragon Abode and Wu Tingfang, Ting Fangshi together with the 4 maids were kneeling along the door to welcome him according to the procedures required of a wife and concubine to welcome the return of a long absent husband.

He did not expect Wu Tingfang to be so obedient and was feeling quite lost because he's not quite sure what he's supposed to do according to procedure. Wu Tingfang smilingly invited him to be seated at the main chair and personally helped to remove his clothes together with Ting Fangshi while the 4 maids happily went to the bathing pool behind to prepare hot water for him.

As Xiang Shaolong was enjoying the warm family atmosphere, he can't help but think of the ill-fated Lady Ni. Especially when he was soaking in the pool, he remembered how he frolicked in the water with this alluring beauty right before he left.

Wu Tingfang is a lot more mature and voluptuous now, and more understanding as well. Not only did she not blame him for being moody, she even attended to him meticulously together with Ting Fangshi, using their pretty bodies to sooth his seriously injured heart.

In his daze, together with the fatigue from a long travel, Xiang Shaolong did

not even know how he got onto the bed and when he woke up, it's already deep into the night.

On the huge bed, beneath the warm blanket, there was only the flimsily clad Wu Tingfang hugging him tightly, sleeping sweetly.

Once Xiang Shaolong moved, she woke up immediately; obviously her concentration is totally upon her beloved.

Wu Tingfang asked gently, "Hungry? You haven't had dinner yet!"

Xiang Shaolong hugged her tightly, "With you in my arms, everything else is forgotten."

Wu Tingfang exclaimed happily, "It's so good that you're back. Without you, everything lost its interest and meaning. Fang'er did not want to ride horses, play archery, nothing at all, but everyday I'll be counting the days when you'll be back. I never thought that pining for a person could be so painful!"

"After Sister Ya returned, Fang'er went to bother her everyday to tell me about what happened during your journey. Both of us totally idolizes you. I've long said that no one will be able to defeat you."

Xiang Shaolong thought of Lady Ni and felt a stab of pain. He went closer to her ear and whispered, "I'll eat my obedient Fang'er first before eating my late dinner, all right?"

Wu Tingfang exclaimed, "Of course! I've been waiting for your loving for so

long that my neck is growing long from the wait.”

Early the next morning Master Wu sent someone to ask him and Wu Tingfang to join him for breakfast.

Xiang Shaolong hugged Ting Fangshi and cuddled with her for a short while, then kissed the 4 maids who had been ‘painfully waiting’ for him before hurrying to the main residence with the recently ‘nourished’ and exuberant Wu Tingfang.

Once Wu Tingfang saw her grandfather, she expertly used her wiles and mischievous behavior to make him so happy that he was grinning from ear to ear.

During the meal Master Wu told Xiang Shaolong, “After Wu Zhuo returned, he gave me a detailed report of Shaolong’s trip to Wei. I am very pleased with what I heard, Shaolong not only are you more intelligent than others, you’re also brave and heroic. It really is Fang’er’s good fortune to have you as her husband.”

Wu Tingfang saw how her usually picky grandfather was complimenting her husband and was so happy she can’t help but smile sweetly.

Just as Xiang Shaolong was expressing his modesty embarrassingly, Master Wu said, “We’ll choose a time within these 2 days to hold a secret wedding between you and Tingfang. That Ting Fangshi will become your concubine, does Shaolong have any objections?”

Xiang Shaolong rose to bow and offer his thanks while Wu Tingfang lowered her pretty face in bashfulness and joy.

After he returned to his seat, Master Wu continued, “Whether we succeed or fail, Zhao Ya is the key point. Only through her will it be possible for you to get in touch with Ying Zheng and his mother. Luckily she is enamored with you so Shaolong should make use of this relationship well.”

Wu Tingfang pouted, “Grandfather! Sister Ya and Shaolong are truly in love with each other.”

Master Wu sighed, “Little girl! What do you know?”

Xiang Shaolong has no wish to argue with him over this, and he can’t really blame him for this thought because Zhao Ya’s reputation is really too horrible. No one will believe that she will remain true to one person, and even he himself is not totally confident.

Master Wu said, “Last night Guo Zhong sent a messenger over to invite Shaolong to his residence tonight for a feast to celebrate the success of stealing ‘Lu Gong’s Secret Manual’. The other invited guests are Zhao Mu, the Juzi from Zhao Mohism Yan Ping and the person I mentioned to you yesterday, Zhao Ba from the Zhao Warrior Association. With such an arrangement, I’m afraid it’s not going to be something so simple as a celebratory feast.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows on hearing that and asked, “Can I bring some men along?”

Master Wu replied, “Of course you can! Now that you are our Wu family’s Grandson-in-law, and has made great military contributions, your status is different from the past. How can you not have some family warriors following you?”

Xiang Shaolong thought for a moment before asking, “There’s one matter which Shaolong is unable to figure out. King Xiaocheng and Zhao Mu all have the family name Zhao, do they have any blood relations with each other, but why is it they can mess everything up, and even have marriages between those of the same family name?”

Master Wu looked at him in surprise, “You’re confusing me instead. People from the wild mountains like you have never placed much consideration on marriages between blood relatives, so why are you so particular about this matter?”

Only now did Xiang Shaolong remember his ‘real background’ and he pulled off a nonsensical reply, “I’m just perplexed that the royalty would learn from us as well.”

Master Wu would never imagine that he came from another dimension, and even if Xiang Shaolong told the truth, he would not have believed him. He explained, “There are 2 groups of people with the family name Zhao. One of the group is really from the Zhao family tribe, but after so many generations, the blood relations has been thinned greatly so everyone ignores it with some even encouraging marriages within the same family name. The other group are those bestowed the family name ‘Zhao’ by the King, and Zhao Mu is one of the examples.”

Xiang Shaolong nodded his head in understanding.

Master Wu said, “There are 2 people whom Shaolong must be on guard against, and they’re Prince Xinling from Wei and Tian Dan from Qi. These 2 people are extremely formidable and have a lot of expert fighters under them. You’ve stolen the ‘Lu Gong’s Secret Manual’ and killed Xiao Weimou, they will definitely not let you off. Unless they decide not to strike but if they do, it will certainly be after much planning and consideration and their strategy will be astounding, it’s not going to be something easy to deal with.”

Xiang Shaolong raised his brows as he replied, “Shaolong is already mentally prepared, Grandfather please rest assured!”

Master Wu raised his head heavenward and chortled as he reached out his hand to pat his shoulder, saying, “Good! That is my good grandson-in-law.”

Knowing oneself and one’s enemy well is the key to winning a hundred battles.

Even in the 21st century, gathering information is the most important task. It’s just that during that time they can rely on satellites, but here they have to rely on people’s ears and eyes.

Because of this Xiang Shaolong had a discussion with Tao Fang to decide how to find out what Zhao Mu’s strategy against them is. They also extended their spying network to Guo Zhong, Zhao Ba, Yan Ping as well as Zhao Mu’s 2 lackeys, the Physician Guo Kai and General Yue Cheng etc. After that he went with Wu Tingfang to Lady Ya’s residence situated outside the Palace.

Teng Yi and Jing Jun became his personal bodyguards. Once he steps out of the house, they will follow him like a shadow.

Wu Zhuo also chose another 10 excellent fighters to be his followers. All these people went to Wei with him so they have already established strong ties with him, therefore they can naturally work well with one another.

The streets of Handan is livelier and more crowded as well. Looking at the dressing and hearing the accents, a lot of them were traders from other places. Obviously Zhao is now slowly recovering after it's serious defeat at Changping.

Xiang Shaolong and Wu Tingfang rode alongside each other, followed by Teng Yi and Jing Jun with the Wu family soldiers following right at the end and everyone on the streets turned to look at them.

He can't help but feel a surge of emotions.

Thinking back on the day he just arrived in Handan, he couldn't even protect Ting Fangshi then and can't help but have mixed feelings about this.

But all these in front of him, is like a sandcastle built on a beach. One large wave is all it takes for everything to disappear without a trace.

In fact the whole country can use this analogy as well.

Again he felt as if this is a big dream.



Why does life always feel like a dream?

Only during special moments, for example when fighting a battle or when enjoying himself like last night with Wu Tingfang can he clearly feel the presence of life.

No matter how he was thrown into this era, it's difficult for him to feel for what is happening in front of him like the others. Because after all he is from another era, with 2000 more years of experience, that's why he can see more clearly, more deeply and more objectively than any scholar of this era.

Wu Tingfang kept throwing sweet and beguiling smiles at him and soon, they were entering Lady Ya's residence.

Zhao Ya received them in the main hall.

Xiang Shaolong specially introduced Teng Yi and Jing Jun to her and said quietly, "Jing Jun is very good in stealth work at night, going over walls and into houses easily. If there is anything urgent I want to inform you, I will tell him to look for you."

After settling on some simple communication signals, Lady Ya smiled smugly, "Qian'er is waiting for you inside."

Xiang Shaolong was overjoyed and curious at the same time, "King Xiaocheng really agreed to your request?"

Lady Ya led him and Wu Tingfang into the inner hall while Teng and Jing

remained in the outer hall. As they walked, she explained, “I gave Imperial brother a proposal, saying that I want to teach Qian’er the secrets to enticing men so that when she becomes the concubine of another state, she can also make use of her natural beauty to push things that are beneficial to our Great Zhao. Imperial brother is not a person with a mind of his own so after I pointed out to him the advantages to it, he agreed.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly admired Zhao Ya for her quick and tactical ideas. He reached out and hugged her slender waist, tapped her buttocks lightly twice and said, “So Zhao Mu’s family name is not originally Zhao, I wonder who is he and what is his background?”

Zhao Ya replied, “No one in Handan dares to mention this, because Zhao Mu will go to unscrupulous lengths to deal with those who pursue his background. When he came to Zhao he was only 14 years old, and was introduced by an attendant. Because Zhao Mu’s swordsmanship was excellent and was obedient, and at the same time he has the same habit of liking men like Imperial brother so very quickly he won the heart of Imperial brother. At that time Imperial brother has not yet ascended the throne but because of their close relationship, even we could not say anything. I just did not expect that now that Zhao Ni’s death is so full of loopholes, Imperial brother still allowed Zhao Mu to cover everything up. Now everyone in the palace has given up on Imperial brother, but what’s the use of that?”

Xiang Shaolong forced himself not to think of Lady Ni and asked calmly, “Is the attendant who brought him in still around?”

Zhao Ya replied, “Not long after Imperial brother ascended the throne, that

attendant was found to have lost his footing, fell into a well and drowned by someone. At that time we did not suspect anything at all but now that you're asking about it, I think this person is killed by Zhao Mu to prevent him from revealing the secret of his background."

Xiang Shaolong asked, "Is that attendant from Zhao?"

Lady Ya thought for a moment before replying, "I'm not sure, but it's not difficult to find out."

Xiang Shaolong reminded her, "This investigation must be done secretly."

Lady Ya pouted, "All right! Do I still need you to tell me that?"

Xiang Shaolong was about to speak further when Zhao Qian ran into his arms like a fragrant breeze, her delicate body trembling and using all the strength she has to hug him tightly.

Wu Tingfang laughed, "3rd Princess, so you're equally enamored of him as well!"

Zhao Qian left Xiang Shaolong's safe embrace embarrassingly and holding Wu Tingfang's tiny hand, led her towards Lady Ya's tranquil little building, the 2 girls chattering non-stop, behaving very closely towards each other.

The 4 of them went to the small building and drinking the fragrant tea served by Xiao Zhao and the rest, enjoying the nice morning weather.

The large garden outside the building has turned into a silvery white world, with snowy petals on the trees.

Xiang Shaolong told Wu Tingfang and Zhao Qian, “My 2 obedient lasses, the garden is so pretty, why don’t you take a walk downstairs?”

Naturally the 2 ladies will listen to his every command and knowing that he has business to discuss with Lady Ya, they obediently went down to admire the snowy scene in the garden.

Only now did Xiang Shaolong told Lady Ya about Ying Zheng.

Lady Ya took a long look at him before saying, “Xiang Lang, don’t blame Ya’er for being curious, but it seems that when you first came to Handan, you were already very interested in Ying Zheng. At that time you should not have known about the relationship between the Wu family and Lu Buwei yet, so how did you have such foresight?”

Xiang Shaolong was dumbfounded because with Zhao Ya’s intelligence, no matter how he tries to explain it will still sound inappropriate. Because with his status at that time, he shouldn’t even be aware of the existence of Ying Zheng.

Lady Ya went into his arms and continued, “No matter what secrets you have, Ya’er doesn’t care as long as you love me.”

Xiang Shaolong was touched and after kissing her fragrant lips, said, “Is there a way to arrange a meeting between me and Ying Zheng.”

Lady Ya sighed, “It’s no problem at all arranging for both of you to meet, at the most I’ll sacrifice myself a little. The problem is there’s no way this can be hidden from Zhao Mu. Besides, seeing Ying Zheng may hinder things instead. This person is engrossed with wine and beauty all day long, he’s not much difference from a bum. He also believes that Zhao Mu is his benefactor and friend and worst, he may reveal your secrets to Zhao Mu. That would be terrible!”

Is Ying Zheng really such a person?

Xiang Shaolong felt a problem coming on and asked, “What about his mother Zhu Ji?”

Lady Ya replied, “She is a very smart and formidable woman, and is about 30 odd years old now but she doesn’t look that much older than me at all. She’s really a rare beauty and Zhao Mu and her already started a relationship long ago. However I think she’s only with Zhao Mu for survival. This woman is extremely ambitious and will never be loyal to anyone, including Lu Buwei.”

Xiang Shaolong had an idea and said, “This would be much easier, I will work on this woman.”

He secretly thought that as long as she is ambitious, she will not be satisfied staying in Handan as a hostage, then he will have a chance.

He won’t even mind if he has to sacrifice his body a little.

In order to strike against Zhao Mu, he is willing to use any methods available.

When he returned to the Wu residence and just after lunch, Lady Ya's family warrior arrived to look for him, telling him to go to her residence immediately with the specific instructions not to bring Wu Tingfang along.

Xiang Shaolong felt goose bumps rising, and was totally perplexed. After bidding his farewell to Wu Tingfang and Ting Fangshi, he hurried to her residence with with Teng Yi and Jing Jun.

Zhao Ya stopped them in the main hall and with a somber expression, said, "Empress Jing is here." She continued with gritted teeth, "That conniving thief Zhao Mu really will not let you off even a little."

Xiang Shaolong's heart sank, "It seems like I will have to enter the palace and seek King Xiaocheng's forgiveness." He did not expect that he can't even delay this for half a day.

Lady Ya said, "The situation may not be that bad yet, Empress Jing wants to see you personally!" She continued with a giggle, "A handsome looking man indeed will have some advantages."

Xiang Shaolong smiled bitterly and went into the inner hall to meet Empress Jing.

Empress Jing stood in front of the window with her back facing him and after dismissing her maids, said icily, "Xiang Shaolong you're really bold! Are you not afraid of death? You dare to even despoil 3rd Princess's virginal body!"

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that he has to put on a convincing act so he

knelt down and said, “Shaolong is true towards Princess, and has no intention of toying with her. I hope Empress Jing will try to understand what happened.”

Empress Jing turned around, her eyes furious but her expression cold as ice as she said, “I don’t care if you’re really in love. If his Majesty were to find out, he will surely think that you brought 3rd Princess back to Handan because of your own selfish desires. Besides, stealing what you’re supposed to protect is akin to the crime of lying to the ruler, even his Majesty won’t be able to find an excuse to let you off. It seems that even now you do not realize how serious this is, and to think that I thought so well of you.”

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that something is not right. Looking at her expression and tone of voice, it’s nothing as simple as blackmailing him with this matter to have an affair with her. He has really underestimated her. He remembered Lady Pingyuan once said hers is one of the political marriages arranged for the unification of the 3 states, and she was a Han beauty who married into Zhao. He suddenly had an idea and immediately said, “Shaolong knows he’s made a mistake, Empress Jing save me!”

Empress Jing’s icy façade softened a little and she sighed, “Xiang Shaolong! Stand up!”

Xiang Shaolong stood up and stayed there, not moving.

Empress Jing turned around again, looking at the wintry forest outside the window and said slowly, “What should I do about this? If I hide it for you, it will be found out sooner or later and by then even I will be implicated. If the

Weis were to immediately come and bring 3rd Princess back, what do you think will be the outcome?"

Xiang Shaolong emboldened himself and walked to Empress Jing's back, saying gently, "Don't worry Empress Jing, the King of Wei already had the intention of going back on the agreement. Besides Zhao Mu will try to disrupt this as well so this wedding agreement will certainly drag on. After 6 months to a year, even if 3rd Princess is going to marry, Empress Jing can just push all the blame away."

The Empress was silent for a moment before saying quietly, "I'm risking my life to hide this secret for the both of you, so how will it benefit me?"

Xiang Shaolong thought that here comes the chance and said determinedly, "If Empress Jing were to have any instructions, Xiang Shaolong will go through hell and fire, risking my life to accomplish it for you."

Empress Jing still have not turned around but she said calmly, "Then kill a person for me!"

Xiang Shaolong moved closer, his body pressing against her back as his arms reached out to encircle her tiny waist tightly and nibbling at her ear, asked "Is Zhao Mu the person Empress Jing want to kill?"

Empress Jing's delicate body trembled as she leaned into his arms, "Dueling with a smart person like you really saves a lot of time talking. As long as Zhao Mu remains alive, there is no hope at all for the state of Zhao and my position as Empress is just an empty title, do you understand?"



Xiang Shaolong replied, “I understand! There’s another person, right?”

The other person would naturally be King Xiaocheng because once Zhao Mu and King Xiaocheng are killed, Empress Jing’s son will ascend the throne and Empress Jing’s status will raise to become the Dowager. Since her son is still young, power will naturally land in her hands. Who will care by that time whether Zhao Qian is still a virgin or not?

In order to gain power, people in this era are all vicious. Wives killing husbands, sons killing fathers, everything is done in the extreme.

Although Empress Jing’s body softened with his hug, her mind was still sharp and she said quietly, “You are the one who said it, the person I want to deal with is only Zhao Mu. Ai! It’s not that his Majesty does not want to give you opportunities, but you’re now part of the Wu family and Wu Yingyuan is secretly on close relations with the Qins, so sooner or later they’ll get into trouble and have the whole clan exterminated. But if you get rid of Zhao Mu, maybe I can protect you, or maybe even give you better opportunities.”

Xiang Shaolong turned her body around, hugging her closely to his body. How can Empress Jing stand all these, her face blushed like fire, her breathing rapid, lust filling her.

Xiang Shaolong kissed her heavily on her lips, his hands greedily investigating the restricted areas.

Firstly it’s because of her high and regal status, secondly it’s because her body is voluptuous and alluring, thirdly it’s because of her flirtatious behavior

after her passion was flamed, which made Xiang Shaolong turn reel into real, and enjoy to his heart's content.

Empress Jing used all her willpower and remaining strength to grab his disobedient hands, left his attacking lips and panted coquettishly as she said, "I never say what I don't mean. Within 3 days, I want you to give me a satisfactory proposal, all right?"

The last sentence was filled with soft pleading, as if she has developed feelings for Xiang Shaolong.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that this woman is so formidable she resembles Lady Pingyuan a little. He has to show her how beneficial he is to her, only then can they work happily together. He kissed her face and said, "There's no need for 3 days, I can give you an answer now."

He paused and continued, "To deal with Zhao Mu, there's only 2 ways, by wit or strength. By strength, the plan is naturally to assassinate him; by wit we will check out his background and then lay a trap for him. From what I guess, he must be a spy sent by another state to try and bring down our Great Zhao's political situation from the inside. Or else if he has any love at all for Zhao, he wouldn't have done what he has been doing."

Empress Jing's eyes lighted up and looked at him intently, "You're not simple at all. But remember you'll have to be swift and vicious when dealing with Zhao Mu, or else you will end up falling in his trap instead and you'll never be able to pick yourself up again."

A strong hatred gleamed in Xiang Shaolong's eyes as he said through gritted teeth, "Just the tragic death of Lady Ni is enough to make us stand on opposing ends, so Empress Jing need not worry."

Empress Jing voluntarily kissed him and said, "Shaolong! I have to go. Remember you must not look for me as you will, I will make contact with you instead."

Even after she disappeared around the door, Xiang Shaolong still did not feel relieved at all. On seeing that this woman did not ask to have immediate fun with him, he knows that she can readily control her lusts. This type of woman is the most fearsome and anytime she can turn around and point the gun at him while he is only a useful tool in her hand!

Xiang Shaolong hugged Zhao Qian tightly and reassured her, "Everything's fine now!"

Zhao Qian asked worriedly, "I really do not need to fear anything? If Qian'er has caused you trouble, I can only..."

Xiang Shaolong reached out and covered her tiny mouth, and told Zhao Ya, "You must keep a good watch over Zhao Qian. I will send Jing Jun to lead a few good fighters to pretend to be your family warriors. If it comes to the critical juncture we will be forced to strike."

Lady Ya said, "Please don't do that! In Handan I still have enough power to protect myself and Qian'er. Besides Imperial brother holds me in very high regard now."

She then pulled Xiang Shaolong aside and said quietly, “You asked me to check on that attendant who brought Zhao Mu in, and there’s now some headway. According to an old palace maid, that attendant called He Dan is from the state of Chu and was doted on and trusted by the late King. But what is the use of this news?”

Xiang Shaolong replied, “Right now I don’t know of what use it can be. But Zhao Mu may possibly be a spy sent by the Chus, and his task is to ensure that the 3 states will never be unified.”

Lady Ya nodded and said, “This guess is very reasonable, and also explains why Zhao Mu is linked with Xiao Weimou. Because what Zhao Mu represents is the common benefits for Chu and Qi, both do not want to see the unification of the 3 states.”

Xiang Shaolong furrowed his brows as he thought, “But even if we know this, for now it’s difficult to use this information to deal a blow to Zhao Mu.”

Lady Ya laughed, “Leave this to me, don’t forget I’m an expert in forgery. As long as I have a little information, I will be able to forge secret letters from the Chus to Zhao Mu. And even more delicately make it land in Imperial brother’s hands while Empress Jing and I will fan the flames at the side. Zhao Mu will be in for a hard time then.”

Xiang Shaolong happily hugged and kissed her a few times, “I will ask Tao Fang to keep an eye on any Chus who comes into contact with Zhao Mu, if we can find real proof, that would be ideal.”

After having some fun with Lady Ya and Zhao Qian, Xiang Shaolong returned to the Wu family stockade and he had just stepped through the door when the guards told him, "The Juzi Mister Yan Ping came to look for you, Eldest Young Master is now attending to him."

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that something is wrong, so he braced himself and went to Wu Yingyuan's residence to meet him.

Wu Yingyuan saw that he has returned and made an excuse to leave, leaving the 2 of them sitting opposite each other in the hall.

Yan Ping said with a wooden expression, "Brother Xiang has shown off your capabilities in Wei, making everyone look at you differently, but it has also thrown you into a dangerous situation. I'm sure Brother Xiang knows about it!"

Xiang Shaolong was a little impressed by his straightforwardness and honesty, but because of Yuan Zong's matter, it's difficult for him to work with this person. He sighed and said, "Only idiots will not stir up feelings of jealousy, this is unavoidable."

Yan Ping repeated the phrase 'Only idiots will not stir up feelings of jealousy' twice and was impressed, "Brother Xiang's words are indeed profound, my apologies!" His eyes then turned sharp as he stared at him and said, "No wonder Yuan Zong is willing to hand you the Juzi token."

Xiang Shaolong thought to himself, naturally it must be Zhao Mu who told the Chus. From this he can deduce that Zhao Mu indeed has close

connections with the Chus, that's why the Chus can get hold of the latest news.

Yan Ping said, "This Juzi token is of no use at all to outsiders, and will cause trouble instead. If Brother Xiang can give it to me, I will surely repay you."

Xiang Shaolong really had this urge to just give the Juzi token to him to avoid adding more trouble in future. But Yuan Zong would rather die than hand the token to Yan Ping, and he must have his reason for doing so. Yuan Zong also sacrificed himself so that he can escape to Handan safely so no matter what he cannot let him down. So although by doing so it will only be beneficial to him, he still persevered.

He smiled and said, "Even if the Juzi token is not on Brother Yuan, maybe he hid it or maybe he gave it to someone else, why are you so sure the token is with me?"

Yan Ping replied unhappily, "That means Brother Xiang is refusing to hand the token over. This is such an unintelligent move, now there are many people in Handan who wants to see Brother Xiang dead and if I help them, would Brother Xiang be able to handle it?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed icily, "You should be responsible for Brother Yuan's death, I have not settled this score with you and yet you dare to threaten me."

Yan Ping stood up suddenly and said calmly, "Fine! Xiang Shaolong! You're brave. If you can reach the Guo residence safely tonight, then let me try you

out on your Mohist swordplay!”

He laughed loudly thrice and left like the wind.

Xiang Shaolong secretly thought that others have threatened him since he was young so he’s not afraid of such threats at all. He left to look for Teng Yi and Wu Zhuo.

## **Chapter 11**

### **The 3 major killer strikes**

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Yuan Zong is really dead! A wave of sadness coursed through Xiang Shaolong. He thought of his desolate times in Wu An, Yuan Zong not only provided him with food and lodging, but also taught him Mohist Swordplay. Those 3 months he spent with him gave him the ability to survive in this messy time, he's really indebted to him. If he did not know that Yan Ping caused the death of Yuan Zong, he would not have made enemies with this Juzi from Zhao Mohism. Although he gained a few hundred more fearsome opponents because of this, his heart is still glad.

He laid on a bed and enjoyed the after bath massage given to him by Chunying and the other 3 maids, trying to relax himself so that he can deal with the continuous battles tonight. This is a lawless world where the strong will survive. Or else he would have made a police report and request for bodyguards. He toyed with the square token with the single word 'Mo' in his hand, the Juzi Token, and felt it's strange icyness.

Those traitorous Mohists Yan Ping and Fu Du, why are they going to all lengths to get this token? The 2 issues of Yuan Zong not having the Juzi token on him and the night attack at Prince Xinling's residence by the Chu Mohism, it must be because that conniving thief Zhao Mu who informed Yan Ping so that he can come cause trouble with him. This person is really extremely vicious, just a few words from him is enough to throw him into danger. He studied the token in his hand closely.



When he read martial arts novel in the 21st century, they always wrote that whatever token, as long as it's in one's hands, that person will have ultimate power over a sect or group of people and can command them. But obviously this Juzi token has no such power or Yuan Zong can always hold it up and there'll be no need to run for his life. Therefore this Juzi token must have some other more substantial value, and not something so simple as a symbol of the Juzi status.

But if that's the case, why didn't Yuan Zong tell him. Or could it be he has not found out the secret himself, so he did not reveal it since he's doubtful as well? At this time Wu Tingfang and Ting Fangshi walked laughingly towards the pool and sat down next to him. 2 more pairs of delicate hands joined to massage his muscles. He was so comfortable he closed his eyes, but his fingers were still rubbing the Juzi token.

When he touched that word 'Mo', the 2 upper dots of the character seemed to have undiscernibly rotated a little and he opened his eyes to take a closer look in shock. He used his thumb to rub harder but the 2 protruding dots did not move at all. He quietly sighed and was about to give up when he suddenly thought that if it's so easy to find out the secret to the Juzi token, Yuan Zong would have found it long ago. So he concentrated on his study again.

Wu Tingfang was laughing at that side, "Xiang Lang! What treasure is this, you're looking at it more intently than when you look at us!" While Ting Fangshi commented, "That thing is so exquisite!" Xiang Shaolong just replied with a smile and used his fingertips to push hard on that 2 round dots but there is still not reaction at all.

Wu Tingfang was feeling mischievous so she leaned over and gently bit his ear and pulled it. Xiang Shaolong was so comfortable he moaned and was about to put the Juzi token and deal with her when he suddenly had an idea. If pushing it down is useless, what about pulling it up? So he instructed Chunying to get him a small plier, pinched one of the round dots and pulled up with his might. There was a ‘tak’ sound and the round dot rose up almost half an inch from the token. Xiang Shaolong was immediately energized and sat up.

The women all crowed around him in puzzlement and all of them joined in to study the token in his hand. Xiang Shaolong pulled up the other dot and now it looks as if there are 2 round pillars protruding on the ‘Mo’ word. He can’t help but feel nervous and tried to turn the little pillar clockwise and it really turned, making another sound which sounded like a lock being opened. The women all tittered in amazement.

Wu Tingfang grabbed his arms and said, “Something is hidden inside, Xiang Lang, turn the other one quickly.” Xiang Shaolong took a deep breath, suppressed his nervous feeling and turned the other tiny pillar. He tried but it did not move. However, when he turned it anti-clockwise, something strange happened. There was a ‘tak’ sound and the Juzi token separated, revealing a tiny rolled brocade parchment of about 5 inches inside. The women cheered. Xiang Shaolong was utterly shocked and knows that he finally found the secret to this Juzi token by sheer luck.

He opened the tiny scroll on the bed, and it’s about 20 feet long, filled tightly with diagrams and tiny words. The first half is the upper volume ‘Mohism Military Tactics’, the lower volume on the second half are all sword strokes.

At the beginning of the scroll it's written 'Mohist Swordplay's addendum of the 3 major killer strikes'. Xiang Shaolong was extremely interested and upon a closer read, he was secretly ecstatic. It turns out that these 3 major killer strikes are all offensive sword moves, a great contradict to the idea of mainly defense in the Mohist swordplay. He wonders if it's because Mo Yu had a change of heart in his later years and created these 3 offensive moves to supplement the inadequacies of the swordplay.

Although it's named 3 strikes, but each strike there are at least a hundred odd diagrams, so obviously it's an extremely complicated move. The most intricate thing is these 3 stokes are all related to defense, so it can be used seamlessly with the Mohist Swordplay Yuan Zong taught him.

The first stroke is named 'Defending instead of attacking'. Those lifelike human drawings were drawn sitting, walking, holding swords, jumping and rolling, and in all kinds of positions. Each picture is accompanied by detailed instructions and ways of using it. Each word is marvelously written and clear, making one feel extreme awe for this person Mo Yu's intelligence.

The second stroke is named 'Attacking instead of defending'. If the first stroke is akin to stability like the mountains, this second stroke is like shocking waves that can split the shores, with unfathomable strength. Just these 2 strokes alone is enough to contain the essence of attacking and defending in swordplay. When matched with the Mohist swordplay, the power is increased many fold.

The third stroke is named 'Attacking and defending concurrently', its changes are even more complex but it's not the merger of the other 2 strokes, but an

extremely mysterious swordplay. Not only are there defenses in the attacks, there are also attacks in the defenses, and the most formidable part is that it is ever changing, at anytime it can change from attack to defense or vice versa, making Xiang Shaolong totally inebriated while looking at it.

For now there's no need for him to study the military tactics in the scroll, so he picked up his wooden sword and went to the courtyard, concentrating on studying and practicing these 3 sword strokes. The women all sat in the small pavilion in the courtyard, looking at their beloved concentrating as he danced with his sword.

Xiang Shaolong read as he practiced and initially he had to stop and read frequently but when he got used to the moves, every move he made, whether cutting, slashing, piercing or carving, all of it contained the essence of the swordplay. Unconsciously he was absorbed into the mysterious swordplay and forgot about everything else. Such wondrous feeling, it's the first time he tasted it ever since he learnt swordplay from Yuan Zong. The wooden sword seems to suddenly feel so light as he moved according to instructions, making sounds as it sliced thru the air, becoming the howl of a hero, increasing the formidable aura enough to make others afraid.

He combined it with the original Mohist swordplay and practiced again and for a moment the sword aura was everywhere, at times quiet and at times moving. When quiet it feels like the calm sea, but when moving it feels like angry waves, the changes unfathomable. The women were all intoxicated by the sight, only feeling that Xiang Shaolong's every pose is extremely exquisite, every move showing the extreme capability of a human body, both quiet and exciting, forming into an earth shattering aura.

Time flies, and it was only when Teng Yi, Jing Jun and Wu Zhuo came to look for him that Xiang Shaolong realized that he has unconsciously practiced swordplay for 6 hours. For someone who has never learned Mohist swordplay, he may not even gain any headway with these 3 strokes even after practicing for 3 years but for Xiang Shaolong, 6 hours is enough for him to learn a lot and change into a new person. Xiang Shaolong did not feel tired at all.

He was curious, the strange breathing method of Mo Yu must be related to the mysterious innate ability in humans. If in future he can follow his method of meditation and practice his breathing, the effect may be even more miraculous and he may very well become a martial arts expert like those portrayed in martial arts novels, having mysterious internal energy. After he hurriedly washed up, he went to the hall to meet with Wu Zhuo and the rest.

Teng Yi looked at him in surprise, “Brother Xiang looks energized, like you’ve changed into another person, has something worth congratulating happened.” Wu Zhuo added, “Young Grand Master-in-law’s are sharper than before, it’s really astonishing!” Xiang Shaolong was secretly ecstatic but he changed the topic and said, “How many men can be used right now?”

Wu Zhuo replied, “We have enough men, it’s no problem moving 500 to 600 of them but once we do that, we will reveal the real strength we have and in the long term it’s more harmful than beneficial.” Xiang Shaolong was extremely confident, “Why not just the 4 of us, together with 10 elite fighters you pick, and we’ll try it out!” The 3 of them were collectively startled, isn’t this obvious who will be stronger or weaker?

Xiang Shaolong continued, "If we were to fight head on, we'll definitely lose but now our aim is just to safely reach Guo residence, so it's 2 different matters." Jing Jun said, "If I'm the only one, I'm very confident that I will slip into the Guo residence unnoticed." Wu Zhuo suddenly became excited, "To be able to fight together with Young Grand Master-in-law, is indeed the happiest thing. Come! Let us discuss this." He took out a painting from the front of his chest, and it turns out to be the street map of Handan.

Wu Zhuo pointed at a small hill in the city and said, "The Guo residence is on this hill, there are only 2 proper roads towards there, which leads to the front and back courtyards of the Guo residence. The other areas are either rocky terrain or dense forests." Teng Yi added, "As long as we can reach the hill, with the rocks and dense forests as cover, we need not fear them using arrows or long distance projectiles, nor need we fear their bigger numbers."

Wu Zhuo said, "The problem is that they will certainly send men to keep an eye on us, then they will be able to choose any point in the mile long journey to attack and kill us." Xiang Shaolong thought hard for a moment before saying, "We can use the tactic of 'Openly repairing the road while sneaking to Chen Cang' ...

Looking at them looking at him in bewilderment, he remembered that the story of Chen Cang happened during the Chu-Han contention, so naturally they have never heard of it. He hurriedly changed his words, "Wu Zhuo you can send out 3 horse carriages at the same time, traveling towards 3 different directions. Those Mohists will certainly have to go after all the carriages and by the time they realize there's no one in the carriages, their strength is already divided. Only then will we set off, throwing them into

disarray.” The 3 of them thought that this plan is workable on hearing it.

Jing Jun commented, “We can use ropes and hooks to climb over family residences, and those following us will certainly be caught unprepared and not know what to do!” The more they talk the more excited they became, as if they have already won the battle. In the end Xiang Shaolong said, “If I am Yan Ping, I will definitely leave my men at the bottom of the hill where the Guo residence is, by then we can make use of the dense forest and have a good fight with them.”

Teng Yi’s expression changed, “Why don’t Jing Jun and I slip there first and lay some traps, then we’ll be even more confident.” Jing Jun loves making trouble and he jumped up, “No time to lose, there’s still 4 more hours to the feast, we will bring our equipment there immediately and start making traps.” Wu Zhuo stood up and said excitedly, “What do you need, I can provide everything.”

After the 3 of them left, Xiang Shaolong went back to his bedroom and took out his equipment and the belt filled with his flying needles and secured them around his body before kissing his wives and maids farewell and hurrying to meet with Wu Zhuo. On the way he saw a very happy looking Tao Fang. Tao Fang pulled him aside and said, “We’re really lucky, we found out about a mysterious person who just happened to meet Zhao Mu today and from his accent he’s definitely a Chu.”

Xiang Shaolong asked happily, “Has he been captured?” Tao Fang replied, “He’s still in the city. If we try to capture him we may alert the others. According to our spy’s investigations, he booked the room at the inn until

tomorrow morning. As soon as he steps out of Handan, we'll capture him alive and imprison him at our pasture. I don't believe his mouth can be as stubborn as our torture equipment." Xiang Shaolong put his arms around Tao Fang's shoulders and chortled as they walked out, "If we can get proof of that conniving thief's nefarious schemes, we'll make sure he'll get his just desserts."

At this time the 2 of them reached the large open space behind the main door where Wu Zhuo has prepared 3 horse carriages and was waiting for his instructions. Tao Fang asked quizzically, "There's only one of you, why do you need 3 horse carriages?"

Xiang Shaolong laughed, "The 3 horse carriages are all not for me, but a gift to that short lived Yan Ping!" As he chortled, he let go of Tao Fang and left.

End of Book 04